











Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

# REPENTED AT LEISURE.

By BERTHA M. CLAY. *pseud.*

*Mrs. Charlotte M. Brann*

*Author of "Dora Thorne," "Her Mother's Sin," "Beyond Pardon," Etc., Etc.*

---

CHICAGO AND NEW YORK:  
BELFORD, CLARKE & COMPANY,  
PUBLISHERS.

TO THE  
LIBRARY OF

TROW'S  
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING COMPANY,  
NEW YORK.



755  
1381  
r

# REPENTED AT LEISURE.

---

## CHAPTER I.

ETHEL GORDON sat in her own room alone, and no room ever gave a more correct idea as to its owner's mind than did this. The profusion of flowers, all beautifully arranged, yielding sweet perfume, the choice books, pictures, copies of world-renowned works of art, and vases and ornaments of rare design, were all indications of highest refinement and cultivation.

Ethel Gordon was not unworthy of her surroundings. She gave promise of a magnificent womanhood; her slender, girlish figure was admirably graceful, her attitude perfection; every unstudied pose was statuesque. Her face was beautiful with a bright beauty of its own; rich brown hair fell on the graceful neck; her eyes were of the rare hue of a purple heart'sease, a golden light shining in their liquid depths, a light that deepened with every phase of feeling, that flashed with scorn, or gleamed with tenderness, or shone with pride. Beautiful eyes they were, for one glance of which men would have fought in olden days and died; the brows were straight, like those of a Grecian goddess—brows of ideal loveliness. The ancient Greeks gave such a mouth as hers to Venus, for it was one of singular beauty the upper lip being short, the lower one full and curved, while the dimpled chin was faultless.

There was no flaw in her beauty from the crown of her

961745

fair head to her tiny feet. Her small, white hands had a delicate rose tint; her arm was round and perfect in contour. Yet she did not possess the cold, perfect, regular beauty of a woman without fault. There was pride and, perhaps, some little degree of temper in the bright eyes, just as there was something of independence and hauteur in the curved lips.

The sunbeams were falling on her, and the sweet south wind, bearing the scent of hawthorn and lilac, was fanning her brow; but she was not looking well pleased. She was standing at an open window, watching the slanting sunbeams, her little white fingers tapping impatiently on the window frame.

“I am a Gordon,” she said to herself. “I like my own way, and I will not submit to it!”

At that moment a footman came to say that Sir Leonard Gordon awaited his daughter in the library.

“I will be there directly,” said Ethel, carelessly—it was one of her principles never to seem in haste. She remained for a few minutes longer at the window just to gratify her spirit of independence, and then she walked slowly to the library, where Sir Leonard awaited her.

Sir Leonard Gordon resembled his daughter in several respects—he had the same clear-cut, regular features, the same waving rich brown hair; but his face, handsome though it was, bore marks of deep care and thought, while the hair was streaked with gray. He was a tall, aristocratic-looking man, with an impressive air of dignity and command.

“Come in, Ethel,” he said, in a deep, musical voice. “I want to speak to you very particularly.”

A musical voice and a winsome smile were the heirlooms of the Gordons. Their features might and did vary—some were of the dark, proud Norman, others of the fair, calm Anglo-Saxon type—but all alike had a voice of soft-

est music, and a smile that would have melted a heart of stone. There had been faithful Gordons, and false Gordons—Gordons true as steel, and treacherous as the men who betrayed their young queen ; but every Gordon could be recognized by these two gifts.

“Sit down, Ethel,” said Sir Leonard. “I have much to say, and you will be tired.”

But the spirit of independence and contradiction seemed to be strong in his beautiful daughter this May morning.

“I prefer to stand, papa,” she replied ; and Miss Gordon swept across the room, with a haughty bearing not lost upon Sir Leonard. He smiled to himself, and it was just as well that Ethel did not see that smile.

“I have sent for you, Ethel,” he said, “that we may come to some amicable arrangement of our difficulties. I hope you have come prepared to be just and reasonable.”

“If you are determined to have your own way, papa, it is useless my arguing with you,” returned Ethel, proudly,

“I am afraid, my dear, that we Gordons are too fond of our own way ; but I think you and I can arrange our difficulties without coming into collision. It is useless to talk to a Gordon of submission ; but, if I can convince your judgment, you will obey me, I hope.”

“I am not very clever at obedience, I fear,” said Miss Gordon.

“No, you have been spoiled, Ethel, ever since you were a child ; and, now that you are seventeen, it is difficult to contend against the effects of that spoiling. See, my dear,” and Sir Leonard held out an open letter to his daughter ; “I received this by the morning’s post from the Austrian Ambassador, and I must send in my reply to-night.”

She took the letter, read it carefully, and then laid it on the table.

“It is complimentary,” she said; “and he speaks of the position as a lucrative one.”

“It is so now, Ethel. You are old enough to understand some of the cares that have turned my hair white, and have lined my face with marks that nothing will efface.”

Her beautiful face softened for a few moments, and the proud eyes grew dim with tears.

“Although,” he continued, “I am the representative of one of the oldest families in England, owning Fountayne Hall in England and Heatherbrae in Scotland, yet I am a poor man. I never know the luxury of having a sovereign to spare. My father, who succeeded to a rich inheritance, spent all he could. He gambled, played, bet heavily, bought extravagantly—he ruined himself, Ethel, and consequently ruined me. When I succeeded to Fountayne, it was one of the poorest estates in England. Your mother, Lady Angela, brought with her a good fortune, and that helped me—indeed, but for that I must have sold the Hall. Your mother’s fortune cleared off the heavy mortgages; still, it has been difficult to live. Now, this offer of the Austrian Ambassador comes in the very hour of need. I wanted a few thousand pounds; and, if I go, they will be mine.”

“It is an inducement, certainly,” she said, gravely.

“A very great inducement,” he agreed. “For the first time in my life, I shall be quite at ease as to money matters—Heaven grant you may never know what that implies, Ethel—and the advantages in other ways will be great.

“Why not then decide at once upon accepting the offer, papa?”

“Because the decision rests with you. I cannot leave home for two years, and leave you alone, unprotected, uncared for—it is out of the question.”

“There never was a Gordon yet, incapable of taking care of himself or herself,” said the girl, proudly.

Sir Leonard laughed and shook his head.

“You are only just seventeen, and that is no age for ripe judgment. You are too young to be left in charge of a large house like Fountayne. You have not had experience enough.”

She went up to him and laid both hands on his shoulders, gazing straight into his face.

“Now, papa, look at me; tell me the truth. Who really governs the house now?”

Sir Leonard’s face flushed; he laughed uneasily.

“If you insist upon the truth, there can be no doubt, Ethel, that you rule the house and every one in it; but you must remember that I am here to take all responsibility from you.”

“That which I am old enough to do in your presence I can surely do in your absence,” she said, proudly.

“That is the very point on which we disagree,” returned Sir Leonard; “and on that point my decision rests. We will argue the matter fairly, Ethel, and you will see that I am right. In the eyes of the world,” continued Sir Leonard, “I should be greatly to blame if I went away leaving a girl so young as you, Ethel, to manage a large house—above all, if I left you without a chaperon of any kind.”

“A chaperon!” repeated his daughter, contemptuously. “Of what possible use would a chaperon be to me?”

“She would keep you out of all danger; young girls are easily imposed upon. She would teach you to fulfil the duties of your station in a proper manner. In fact, Ethel, it is useless to argue the question; you cannot possibly do without one. You would lose caste in the eyes of the world, and would be certain to get into mischief.”

"If I ever forget myself so far as to feel any inclination for mischief, no amount of chaperonage would keep me from it," said Miss Gordon, proudly. "I am too old to be taught to obey a stranger."

"My dearest Ethel, how proud you are! I fear that some great sorrow—some great and terrible pain—will be your portion—will be sent to break the pride, the unbending spirit that nothing seems to move."

"All the Gordons are proud, papa. Why blame me for having one of the characteristics of my race?"

"Submissiveness and gentleness, Ethel, form a woman's diadem."

"A very poor one!" objected Ethel. "Now, papa, be reasonable. Give up this absurd notion of a chaperon; go to Austria—that is a magnificent offer—one you should not refuse. Leave me here at Fountayne; I shall have a staid old housekeeper and faithful servants; what more can I need?"

"My dear Ethel, what would the world say if I left a girl of seventeen alone in that fashion?"

"I do not care for the world," retorted the girl. "I care about pleasing myself."

"You cannot run counter to the opinion of the world, Ethel; at your age the idea is absurd. You must submit to the inexorable laws of custom and etiquette."

Sir Leonard spoke angrily, with flushed face and darkening eyes. Both father and daughter were growing terribly earnest.

"What if I refuse to have anything to do with a chaperon? Papa, if I refuse to obey one, what then?" asked Ethel.

"In that case I should certainly refuse the offer," said Sir Leonard. "I should write to the ambassador and decline. But Ethel, you will surely take my disappointed, blighted life into consideration before you do that?"

The girl was silent for some minutes ; then, turning to him her beautiful face all flushed and eager, she said, persuasively :

“ Let me make one more appeal to you papa. Go to Austria, and leave me here. I will be prudence itself ; I will surpass discretion in all I do or say ; I will promise you that no stranger shall ever cross the threshold ; I will obey every law you may lay down for me, if you will consent to leave me free and unfettered.”

“ My dear Ethel, I cannot do it. You do not know what you ask. A girl of seventeen, left in such a position, would quite lose caste. If you were twenty, or even thirty, I would not do it.”

“ You refuse, then ? ” she said, quietly.

Sir Leonard moved uneasily in his chair ; he did not like, when looking on that beautiful face, to refuse a prayer.

“ I must do so for your own sake as well as mine. I cannot leave you alone, Ethel, and I will not.”

She was silent for some minutes, the flush dying from her face, and the light deepening in her eyes. A struggle was going on between her pride and her love for Sir Leonard ; then she turned to him quite calmly.

“ Will you tell me, then, what you purpose doing, papa ? ”

Sir Leonard looked slightly confused. Something in the beautiful face and proud eyes seemed to agitate him.

“ I may as well—nay, I had far better speak plainly to you, Ethel. The truth is that the sooner you accustom yourself to a chaperon the better it will be for you ; for I am tired of a single life, and I think of marrying again.”

The slender figure was drawn to its full height, the beautiful face was flushed with the deepest crimson, the proud lips wore their most scornful curve.

“ You think of marrying again, papa ! Pray may I ask why ? ”

“ That is hardly a respectful question, Ethel. I have told you my reason. I am tired of a single life, and I have met with a lady who would make me, I am sure, a most excellent wife ? ”

“ Am I permitted to ask who the lady is ? ” asked Miss Gordon.

“ Certainly, my dear. I met Miss Digby last year at the Trexhams’—I met her again at the Davencourts’; and if I must speak plainly, I fell in love with her.”

The scorn on the lovely face deepened.

“ Miss Digby has money, I believe ? ” she interrogated.

“ Yes,” replied Sir Leonard, “ she has money—money made by her father in trade. She lays no claim to high birth or great connections, but, for all that, she is a lady of great accomplishments and refinement.”

“ You would choose a tradesman’s daughter to take my mother’s place ? ” asked Ethel, with quivering lips.

“ You must speak respectfully of the lady I hope to make my wife,” returned Sir Leonard, sternly.

“ Do you expect me, Lady Angela’s daughter, one of the Gordons of Fountayne, to obey such a person ? ” inquired Ethel, proudly.

“ I expect you to obey me. I also am a Gordon of Fountayne, and my will is stronger than yours. I have asked Miss Digby to be my life, and she has consented.”

A low cry escaped Ethel’s lips, but she made no comment. Sir Leonard continued,—

“ The same obstacles that prevented my taking you to Austria forbid me to take a wife there ; therefore, I have arranged with Miss Digby to postpone our marriage until my return. You understand that, Ethel ? ”

“ Yes, I understand perfectly,” was the quiet reply,



Sir Leonard looked relieved. He felt that the worst part of the revelation was over.

“Miss Digby, to oblige me, has consented to another arrangement,” Sir Leonard resumed. “Perhaps that will not please you. She is going to spend a few weeks, perhaps months, at St. Ina’s Bay. She has invited you to go with her, and I should like it to be so. Then she has promised to remain with you at Fountayne until I return.”

The girl’s face grew white with anger, her eyes seemed to flash fire.

“I will not submit to such an arrangement,” she said, haughtily. “You are treating me as a child. Papa, you forget that I am a woman.”

Sir Leonard laughed.

“Not quite, Ethel. You are seventeen, and I admit that you are tall for your age; but girls of seventeen are not women.”

“After being mistress of Fountayne for so long, do you think, papa, I can submit to the rule of a stranger?”

“I think you have sense enough to see that you can only submit,” said Sir Leonard. “I love Miss Digby; but it is quite as much for your sake as for my own that I wish to marry.”

“Why for my sake?” asked Ethel, briefly.

“My dear child, you will ask questions the answers to which simply displease you. Because you have grave faults, and requite the gentle training and the wise guidance of a good woman.”

“What are my faults, papa? You seem to have found them out all at once.”

“You are proud, Ethel—proud, unbending, independent. You have no self-discipline, no self-control.”

“Those are all Gordon characteristics,” she objected—“not faults.”

“They are both,” returned Sir Leonard. “You must

do battle with them and overcome them, or you will never be an amiable woman, Ethel."

"I am not quite sure that I wish to be one, papa. Amiable people, as a rule, are weak. I dislike weakness. I may be proud, as you say; but I never said a false word nor did a mean action."

"That I am sure of; but, Ethel, I have spoiled you. You have grown up to have your own way entirely; you have no idea of submission. I have been thinking very much of it lately. I have read the words of some wise man that great pride can only be subdued by great trouble, and I cannot bear to think of my Ethel's bright face shadowed with care. I want you to correct this pride yourself; to learn submission to wise and gentle guidance, so that a woman's greatest ornament, a meek and gentle spirit, may be yours."

Ethel laughed.

"You make me think myself very wicked, papa. When you change the colors of a flower, turn night into day, make thistles grow on rose-trees, then you may hope to change a proud, wilful girl into a meek, submissive woman; but not till then."

"Take care, Ethel. What I cannot do, a mightier Hand may effect. This is the crisis of your life. Think well before you decide that your disposition is immutable."

If either father or daughter could have seen to what this was to lead, they would have prayed that the May sunbeams might fall on her dead face, rather than that she should suffer what was in store for her.

Ethel made no reply, and Sir Leonard, whose relief at having unburdened himself of his communication was great, rose from his chair.

"I shall drive over to see Lady Davencourt this afternoon. You had better go with me, Ethel; Miss Digby is

staying there, and I should like to introduce you to her. I shall be ready at two."

And then Sir Leonard quitted the library, and his daughter passed through the open glass-door into the garden.

## CHAPTER II.

OUT from the darkened room where she had suffered the keenest torture of her life, out in the beautiful sunshine, to the fair, smiling flowers, to the sweet singing birds, went Ethel Gordon. It was like a change from some dark region to Paradise. She paused and drew a breath of deep satisfaction at finding herself alone in the sweet, warm sunshine. There was a gleam of purple from the lilac trees, a sheen of gold from the drooping laburnum, a glitter of white from the fair acacia blossoms, the roses were budding, large bushes of southern-wood filled the sweet, warm air with fragrance, the white daphnes, purple hyacinths, and mignonettes were all in flower, sweet lilies of the valley nestled among their green leaves. Fountains rippled among the flowers, bright-winged birds flew from tree to tree, all Nature smiled; and Ethel, who had a poet's soul, and a keen, passionate love for all that was beautiful, gave a deep sigh of unutterable content that the world was so fair.

"I love the lilies best," she thought, as she picked a few sprays, and then the memory of all she had just heard came over her, and a low, passionate cry escaped her lips. "I shall hate her," she thought, "and the Gordons, who know so well how to love, know how to hate."

It seemed cruelly hard to her. Sir Leonard had been content with her love and her sway for so many years; now a stranger must come and take both from her. She had been proud of her rule; she was so frank so true, although imperious, so generous, so noble in every word and deed, that the servants of the household, the tenants,

the dependents all worshipped her. Miss Gordon could do no wrong—she dispensed rewards and punishments with a royal hand; no one had ever disputed her will or disobeyed her commands. She had reigned absolutely as a queen, and, girl though she was, the sense of power had been sweet to her. She had enjoyed the exercise of it. If any one wanted a favor from Sir Leonard, it was through Ethel they asked it, and he was never known to refuse. So she had grown up gracious and beloved.

“Miss Gordon is proud,” people said, “but she has a heart of gold;” and now this pleasant rule, this absolute sovereignty, this influence and power, were to be taken from her, and placed in the hands of a stranger. How was she to bear it?

Tears dimmed the bright eyes. She stretched out her hands as though she would fain embrace the grand old hall and the picturesque grounds.

“How shall I bear to see a stranger here?” she murmured; and on that bright May morning no warning came to her that she would have far greater troubles to bear.

The Gordons of Fountayne were, as Sir Leonard said, one of the oldest families in England. They were a handsome race, fair of presence, winning in speech, noble in mind, and chivalrous in manner; they had been celebrated both in song and in story. Legends and stories without number were told of their fair women and dauntless men, but they had never been famed for wealth. Gold had never lasted long in the hands of a Gordon; still they had never been poor until Sir Alexander Gordon, the father of Sir Leonard, took to gambling. He impoverished his estate, himself, and his only son to such an extent that it was doubtful whether Sir Leonard would be able to keep up the position of the family or not. He, however, married an heiress, the Lady Angela Lyle. Her fortune, large as it was, sufficed to pay off the heavy mortgages

only, nothing being left for the improvement of the impoverished estate, so that Sir Leonard was, despite his marriage, always a poor man. He was obliged to scheme and contrive, for Lady Angela required her house in town, her entertainments, her dinners, balls, jewels, carriages, and dress, like other ladies in her position, and Sir Leonard could not refuse her.

“She brought plenty of money to Fountayne, and she must have all she wants,” he was in the habit of saying to himself; so that, during her lifetime even, his hair grew grey, and deep lines came upon his face, all caused by money cares.

Then Lady Angela died, leaving one daughter, Ethel; and this daughter became the pride, the pet, the plaything, and the torment of her father’s life.

She was always beautiful. She had the Gordon face, the bright, winning face that belonged to that debonnair race. She had the quick, impetuous Gordon temper, the Gordon pride. She had all the virtues and many of the failings that characterized her race.

Ethel Gordon had the faults that generally characterize a warm, impetuous, loving, proud nature, and those faults had been fostered in her from the hour in which her baby rule had begun at Fountayne. She was imperious, proud, with the quick temper that belonged to the Gordons. Her face would flush, her eyes flash fire; she would express scorn, contempt, and anger in a moment; but she was quick to forget; she never thought twice of a wrong committed, and those who had borne the brunt of her anger were the first to feel the charm of her generous, kindly manner. She was quick to forgive; if she hurt any one’s feelings, she would do all in her power to atone for it. It was not wonderful that she was loved; she was well worth loving.

She was the very light of Sir Leonard’s eyes, the joy of

his heart, his pride and his delight. He had thought at first of sending her to school, but she had resolutely refused to go. Her refusal was accompanied by such endearing caresses, such a charm of manner, such loving words that Sir Leonard could not be angry; and from that moment her triumphant rule commenced. A long-suffering line of governesses had tried their best to educate her, but it had been found a difficult, almost impossible task. She had caricatured them, mimicked them, caressed them, defied them—did everything, in short but obey them. One more courageous than the rest, went to complain to Sir Leonard.

“Miss Gordon will not obey,” said the unfortunate lady. “What am I to do with her?”

“The Gordons are accustomed to command, not to obey,” said the child.

A wise father would have compelled obedience—would have punished the mutinous speech. But Sir Leonard was not wise. He merely said, sadly:

“People must learn how to obey, Ethel, before they know how to command; the greatest men have yielded the most implicit obedience.”

“So would I to you, papa, but I cannot to those tiresome, complaining women; they always look ready to cry. I do not like governesses and shall be glad when I can do without them.”

The whole household was kept in such a continual turmoil by the warfare between Miss Gordon and her hapless instructors that it was a real relief to Sir Leonard when the last of them went away. Ethel was sixteen then, and she gravely declared her education to be finished.

“I know quite enough, papa,” she said. “Besides, I can have masters if necessary, and that will be so much better than a governess in the house.”

It was wonderful what an amount of knowledge she had

obtained; she had read every book that was within her reach, she had made herself familiar with all the poets, she had a mind stored with all kinds of information—some of it quaint enough. She had taken to music naturally, as birds take to song. She played with most exquisite taste; it seemed as though the half-awakened soul found its voice in her glorious gift of song. If she had been the daughter of poorer people, her destiny must have been the stage, for her voice was of the rarest beauty—a contralto full of sweetness. Much as she disliked all training and discipline she had submitted to anything with regard to her music—long hours of practice, perseverance in exercises—and the result was that she sang with a taste and skill rarely equalled. Sir Leonard was very proud of this gift; there was no pleasure greater to him than that which he derived from his daughter's musical talent.

From her earliest girlhood she had been accustomed to have the full control of her father's house. While barely old enough to know the names of the different dishes, she had been accustomed to give orders for dinner; and the servants had been accustomed to look to her for orders. Child though she was, she had taken the greatest interest in her father's guests; nothing was ever done without consulting her. Accustomed as she had been to the most complete sway and control over everything and every one, it seemed to her now very hard that this power must pass from her into a stranger's hands.

For some time past it had been dawning upon Sir Leonard that with all his daughter's beauty and accomplishments, she was in many respects untrained; by this time he had begun to see that in reality he had fostered and encouraged her faults, not corrected them. Childish passion, when the lovely little face had flushed crimson, and the tiny foot had been stamped upon the floor, was one thing; anger so frankly displayed by a young girl was



different. Love of rule and pride of power were amusing in a child; in a grown girl they were not pleasant.

Then the world, in its interfering fashion, had begun to tell him how much better it would be if he had some lady to chaperon his daughter—how much better it would be if she had some lady companion. When the offer came from the Austrian Ambassador, the matter seemed pressing upon him; it was impossible that he should take her with him; yet it seemed equally impossible that he should leave her at home. There was nothing for it but finding a chaperon for her; and who would be so unexceptionable in every way as the lady he was hoping to marry?

He shrank at first from telling Ethel his resolve, but there was no escape; and her reception of it was more favorable than he had dared to hope.

## CHAPTER III.

THROUGH the green lanes, where the hedges were one mass of bloom, where the hawthorn gave out its fragrance, and the woodbines trailed their long sprays; where starry primroses from their green leaves looked like great golden stars; where the purple violets hid themselves between the fern leaves; where the tall trees met overhead, and the sunshine, passing through the thick branches, fell in golden splendor—through the ancient woods, ringing with the musical song of the birds, great sheets of wild hyacinth and bluebells, which stretched out like the waves of a blue sea, stirring faintly in the warm spring breeze—rode Sir Leonard and his daughter. It was a very paradise of beauty, of music, and sweet perfume.

But neither the smiles of the sun, nor the song of the birds, nor the scent of the flowers brought any brightness to Ethel Gordon. More than once during their ride Sir Leonard turned to her, and said:

“I wish you would look more cheerful, Ethel; all that I am doing is for your own good.”

“I cannot well see, papa, how you can think of marrying again for my especial benefit, but I suppose you know best.”

It was a relief to Sir Leonard to reach Chantry court.

“You will be sure to like Miss Digby, Ethel,” he said; “you will not be able to help it—she is so amiable, so kind of heart, so gentle in manner.”

Miss Gordon made no reply. In her heart she rebelled with the fiercest rebellion against her father's decree; in her heart she had resolved never to like, never to obey, never even to please the lady who was to take her dead mother's place.

Lady Davencourt and Miss Digby were both at home. Sir Leonard and his daughter were shown into the drawing-room, where the baronet tried to look quite at his ease, and Ethel, without deigning to utter a word, sat in one of her most queenly attitudes, beautiful, wilful, and defiant. Sir Leonard turned angrily to her at last.

“Your indulgence of this angry temper, Ethel, proves to me that you are indeed in great need of some one to correct, to guide, and advise you. I say nothing about the want of respect you show to me, but I must impress upon you that it is unladylike.”

The proud lips were not opened in excuse, Ethel gathering the folds of her riding habit around her in a disdainful silence.

Then the door opened, and Laura Davencourt entered. She gave one rapid glance from father to daughter.

“There is something wrong here,” she thought, as she hastened to greet them.

“Lady Davencourt is with Miss Digby in the grounds,” said Laura. “Would you like to join them there?”

A few minutes later the whole party were seated on the lawn under the shade of a large beech-tree. Lady Davencourt greeted her visitors warmly, and then Sir Leonard, taking his daughter’s unwilling hand, led her to Miss Digby.

He introduced them in a few words, and Ethel, raising her proud, frank eyes, looked upon the face of the woman who was to cross her life so fatally.

It was a pleasant face upon which Sir Leonard’s daughter gazed—pleasant, kind, comely, with clear smiling eyes and a beautiful mouth—a face that would win trust and liking, yet would never be very warmly loved. It was essentially the face of a woman whose life had run in narrow grooves, who knew no world outside her own. If a face is any index to the soul, then Miss Digby’s soul

was a narrow one—good, kindly, but narrow. She did not look like one whose ideas were noble and generous; the conventionalities of life were sufficient for her. She understood nothing beyond them; everything uncommon was wrong. She approved of rules and measures; life was to be portioned out, certain things were to be done at certain times, originality she would consider as a sin; and all this Ethel Gordon, with her quick instinct, divined at a glance.

Miss Digby held out her hand with a winning, kindly smile.

“I am so pleased to see you, Miss Gordon! Your papa has spoken so continually of you that I was quite anxious to see you.”

No answering smile came over the beautiful young face.

“I am much flattered,” replied Ethel, proudly; and from that moment Sir Leonard’s chosen wife saw that there would be no chance of winning the love of Sir Leonard’s daughter.

“You must have had a pleasant ride,” continued Miss Digby. “I have never seen Chantry Wood look more beautiful.”

“The woods were beautiful enough,” replied Ethel, “but our ride was not a pleasant one.”

Miss Digby saw that she was treading on dangerous ground, and, like a skilful general, retreated.

Sir Leonard, observing that matters were not upon the most pleasant footing, thought it time to interfere. He came up to Miss Digby and began to talk to her. Laura asked Ethel to take a stroll among the roses, and they went away, leaving the elders alone. Miss Digby looked after them with wistful, longing eyes.

“I am afraid that Ethel does not like me,” she said; and Sir Leonard detected the pain in her voice.

He turned to her and clasped her hand in his,—

"My dearest Helen," he said, "I have never concealed from you that Ethel has been so indulged and flattered that she is quite a spoiled child. Frankly speaking, she is sure to dislike our arrangement ; but I shall ask you to persevere in it, as it is entirely for her good."

"But if she dislikes it so very much," said the lady, slowly, "would it not be better to give it up?"

"Certainly not," replied Sir Leonard, eagerly. "Ethel has never been contradicted in her whole life. It will do her good to find that her will is not quite absolute."

"She will dislike me so much for being the cause of unpleasantness to her," said Miss Digby.

"You will surely bear all that for my sake, Helen? You have promised to love me ; and in the future that lies before us the only drawback I see is my daughter's dislike to all control, and the trouble that you will have with her at first."

Sir Leonard was no longer young, but he was a handsome man. The musical voice and the beautiful smile both had their influence on the lady he loved.

"Bear that for my sake, Helen," he continued, "and there is nothing that I will not do for you in return. I will make you one of the happiest women in the world."

"Do I understand perfectly what you wish me to do?" asked Miss Digby.

"I think so. Ethel has grown up without any control. She has been mistress of Fountayne and everything in it since she was quite a child. I want you, Helen, to impart to her some of your sweet, womanly ways—to train her—to teach her, if possible, the beauty of submission and gentleness, the need of obedience. I want you, if you will, to undo the harm that I have done—to make up for my deficiencies—to give to my daughter that sweet, wise, womanly learning that should have been hers years ago. Do you care enough for me to do all this, Helen?"

"You know that I do," she replied, simply.

"It will not be a pleasant or an easy task. You will have great difficulties, but I have faith in you, Helen. You will overcome them for my sake?"

"I promise you to do my best," she replied, with a sigh.

She did most dearly love this handsome, gallant man by her side. She looked forward with the keenest pleasure to passing the remainder of her life with him; but she shrank from being brought into collision with his daughter.

"It will only be for a time," continued Sir Leonard; "Ethel has plenty of sense. She will see that it is for her own good. I know you will be patient with her, Helen. She is always full of spirits, gay, happy; there is a certain half-wilful, half-defiant frankness about her that is very charming; you will grow fond of her—everybody does—and she will charm you in spite of yourself."

Miss Digby smiled, thinking that in this respect she resembled her father.

"You must be firm with her," he continued. "I candidly confess that she has her own way with me, because I never could resist her caresses, her winsome manner, her graceful ways; but you, Helen, must harden your heart against her pretty wiles. You must make her go your way, not her own."

"You give me credit for great courage in asking me to undertake a task from which you recoil," she said; "but I will try to accomplish it."

He kissed her hand, thanking her in his own graceful fashion.

"I have but one regret, Helen," he said; "and it is that you should have anything that seems like a task. And a task it will be to tame that bright, wild bird of mine."

And there came to him no warning of how Ethel, his proud, beautiful daughter, would in reality be tamed.

## CHAPTER IV.

MISS DAVENCOURT and Ethel wandered from the lawn to the rose garden, and there they were content to sit. Ethel watched the opening blooms with a far-off look in her beautiful eyes ; the glory of white and of crimson, the deep glow of the damask were lost upon her. Laura, in her turn, watched the proud, perfect face until she felt compelled to speak.

“ Will you tell me of what you are thinking, Miss Gordon ? ” she asked. “ Your eyes are fixed upon the roses, but you do not see them. What are you thinking about that engrosses you so entirely ? ”

A smile came slowly to the beautiful lips.

“ I am thinking,” replied Ethel, “ of Miss Digby. I do not like her.”

“ Yet she is very much loved and liked. She is popular among all kinds of people.”

“ I have a theory of my own,” continued Ethel, in a musing voice, “ and I am a great believer in it.”

“ Perhaps you will enlighten me ? ” said Laura.

Ethel’s frank eyes lingered for one minute on her companion’s pretty face.

“ I am not quite sure,” she said, “ whether you will understand it.”

“ I will do my best,” was the reply. “ Tell me what your theory is.”

“ I believe,” said Ethel, “ that souls recognize each other, as bodies do. For instance, I meet a stranger, my eyes see his features, note the shape of his face, the color of his eyes, his height, the fashion of his build ; so I be-

lieve also that souls see each other, recognize each other, take cognizance of each other's defects and virtues. My eyes saw Miss Digby's face, and I did not like it; my soul saw Miss Digby's soul, and did not like it either. What do you think of my theory, Miss Davencourt?"

"Perhaps it accounts for the likes and dislikes we form without in the least knowing why," replied Laura. "But you are prejudiced against Miss Digby; she is kind, amiable, and self-sacrificing."

"I understand her quite as well as though I had known her for years," said Ethel. "She is one of those who model life after a certain fashion; she would think it wrong to act upon impulse, whereas I like impulse. I should imagine no two people could be more different. I shall never like her."

"That is unfortunate, replied Laura, quietly. "Sir Leonard's arrangement is no secret from us. He told mamma that he hoped to marry Miss Digby on his return from Austria, and that in the meantime you were to stay with her."

Ethel's beautiful face grew white even to the lips, while her slender fingers played nervously with the crimson leaves of a damask rose.

So it was known already that her father contemplated a second marriage; every one knew that she, Ethel Gordon, was to reign no longer, but must submit to the sway of a stranger. She literally could not endure the thought, but rose hastily from her seat.

"Those roses are overpowering," she said; "come away, please. I have no wish to discuss Miss Digby," And she walked down the gravel path.

"We had better rejoin mamma," said Miss Davencourt, "she is alone. Sir Leonard is talking to Miss Digby. Where is she going?—I forget the name of the place."



"To St. Ina's bay," replied Ethel.

"We were speaking of you last evening," continued Miss Davencourt. "It will be hard for you to give up the authority you have held so long."

There was a *soupcçon* of malice in the smile which accompanied these words, and Ethel detected it. All the pride of the Gordons flashed in her face. No matter what she suffered, the world must not know it. No man or woman living must be able to laugh because Ethel Gordon was deposed from her sovereignty. She resolutely conquered herself.

"I am not sure," she returned, "I shall be able to tell you more when the experiment has been tried."

Laura Davencourt looked up in surprise. She had expected the young girl to reply dolefully, but her voice was clear, soft, and gay.

Laura professed to like Miss Gordon, yet more than once she had felt jealous of the beautiful Ethel, and rather enjoyed the prospect of seeing her deposed. But Ethel would not allow this girl to triumph over her.

Miss Digby resolved that no effort should be wanting on her part to win Ethel's affection. She could understand the girl's petulance at her disappointment, and resolved to bear patiently with it. She said to herself that she would never resent it; that she would never reply to Ethel's bitter little speeches, but would do her best to win her by gentleness, by affection, and kindness.

When the two young girls appeared—Ethel with a proud, haughty carriage, and calm, almost scornful face, Laura flushed and somewhat discomfited—she wondered greatly. Resolved to put her quite at her ease, Miss Digby went up to her.

"Have you been admiring the roses?" she asked. "They are considered very fine."

The proud eyes looked her through, the proud lips

opened slightly, and then Miss Gordon made some half inaudible reply and passed on.

"Ethel," said Miss Digby, gently, "if you can give me a few minutes I should be so pleased. I want you to listen to something that I have to say."

Ethel turned. It was no part of her duty as yet, she thought, to listen to Miss Digby. The beautiful face was a study as she half turned round, the better to hear what her companion had to say.

"Ethel," repeated Miss Digby, "I wish you would learn to know me and like me."

"You think the one would be the sequel to the other," replied Ethel; "I do not. I have no doubt that in time I may know you; but liking you is a different matter."

She spoke so frankly, so fearlessly, that it was impossible not to admire her.

"If I study your wishes, Ethel—if I do all I can to make you happy—surely you will like me then?"

"Not then, or ever, I think," replied Ethel. "In the first place, Miss Digby, you take my dead mother's, Lady Angela's place; and you will pardon me if I say that, in my opinion, no one on earth is fitted to take that place."

"It is only natural, Ethel, that you should think so. I admire you for it. I loved my own mother after that fashion."

"Then," interrupted Ethel, quickly, "you would not have liked to see any one in your mother's place?"

"Perhaps not," admitted Miss Digby. "But you love your father, too, Ethel. Now, if I can contribute to his happiness, surely you would love me all the better for it?"

Ethel looked up at her with clear, dauntless eyes.

"I do not think that I should," she replied. "Now that my mother is dead, my father's love belongs by right to me alone."

"That is a selfish view of the matter," said Miss Digby,

gently. "Sir Leonard has a right to be happy in his own way, as you have to be in yours."

"It is a question that we need not argue," interrupted Ethel, proudly. "If my father thinks you will add to his happiness, I have no more to say; but there is a second reason which makes the contemplation of such a marriage very displeasing to me. I have been accustomed to rule in my father's house; no one has ever disputed my sway. The servants have been accustomed to obey my orders, and frankly speaking, it will seem very hard for me to yield my authority to a stranger.

Miss Digby looked compassionately on the beautiful, imperious face, with its flashes of tenderness and defiance.

"It is hard for you," she said, with grave gentleness; "but it will most certainly be for your ultimate good."

"All disagreeable things are for our good," remarked Ethel, brusquely. "Will you explain, Miss Digby, why you say so?"

The lady smiled at the petulant words.

"I shall be in greater disgrace than ever," she said; "but, since you ask me frankly, I will answer you frankly. It will be for your benefit, because you are too young to have so heavy a charge upon you as the care and direction of Fountayne Hall. If you do it, and do it well, then your education and culture must suffer. You cannot attend to both."

"My education is finished," said Ethel, with great dignity.

"Pardon me, it has not even begun. I mean, not the truest, brightest part of education—learning to control and govern ourselves—that is its true end, Ethel."

"I have fulfilled my duties," argued the young girl; "no one can do more."

Miss Digby looked at her sadly.

"Then you will not promise even to try to like me?"

“No,” was the lingering reply. “I am very frank Miss Digby, and it would be cruelly false to say ‘Yes.’ I cannot like you. If I possibly can, I will persuade papa even now to abandon both his projects. If I cannot, then I shall never like you, and I shall even love him less.”

She looked up with such scorn—with such a conviction that no punishment could be greater for Sir Leonard than the loss of her love—that Miss Digby felt touched.

“You are so frank, Miss Gordon,” she said, “that I cannot help admiring when I really ought to blame you. I must trust to him to win for me some share of what I value very much—your good opinion. Will you believe one thing—that while you are with me I will do my very best to make you happy.”

“I believe that you will try to do so; and I know that you will fail,” was the ungracious answer. After which Miss Digby said no more.

## CHAPTER V.

SIR LEONARD GORDON was not altogether satisfied with his daughter. He had seen an expression of pain on Miss Digby's face that annoyed him. Yet he knew that the more he said to Ethel the more it affected her.

"I ought to have married years ago," he said to himself, "and then Ethel would have been accustomed to obedience. It will be difficult to manage her now."

He found the task even more difficult than he had anticipated. Ethel had been thinking seriously, and the more she pondered the whole affair, the greater became her dislike to it.

"I must make one more effort," she thought; "I will make one more appeal to my father. If he refuses to hear me, let it be so; if he consents, then all the love of my life will hardly suffice to repay him."

She was silent and thoughtful during the remainder of the day. Sir Leonard, watching her, wondered as to the nature of her reflections.

"Is she making up her mind to obey, or to revolt?" he said to himself; but even he was not prepared for what she did.

That same evening Sir Leonard was sitting alone in his own study—a room that he should have used for the purpose of reading and writing, but which was more often devoted to cigars and meditations. The night was so fine, the balmy air so sweet, that he had lowered the lamps, had opened wide the long French windows, had drawn two

chairs together in order that he might lounge at his ease, and sat enjoying the luxury of a choice Havana.

The moonlight fell on tree and flower, on the silent fountains and deep, clear lake—moonlight so bright, so silvery, that it was far more beautiful than the light of day. The dew lay like shining diamonds on grass and leaf, the night wind was laden with the perfume of new-mown hay in the valley, of the hawthorn in the hedges. In the woods a nightingale was singing, and the faint, sweet notes fell clearly on Sir Leonard's ear; the stars were gleaming in the sky—it was one of those nights that awake all the poetry in the depths of a man's soul.

Sir Leonard thought of many things as he sat there, of the high-born Lady Angela, who had been dead so many years—of the beautiful, proud, imperious daughter, whom he had loved as fathers seldom love their children—of the fair-faced, gentle woman who was to be his second wife. There came to him, as he mused a certainty—he had loved Lady Angela, and he loved Helen Digby; but he could see now that the great passion of his life was the love he had felt for his daughter. There was nothing to be compared with that; and now, with the clear stars shining on him, and the fragrant night wind whispering of high and holy thoughts, it occurred to him that his love had been wrong. He had shown it by over-indulgence—by indulging his daughter's every whim and caprice. He had been amused where he should have punished her; he had laughed where he should have scolded; he had given her all power and all authority where he should have insisted upon obedience. He saw it all, now that the clear, calm voice of a wise and sensible woman had pointed it out to him; and he resolved to do all he could to atone for it. He must be firm with her, not yielding to her persuasions, but insisting upon her compliance with his wishes.

Just as Sir Leonard had reached this point in his meditations, two white arms were clasped round his neck, and a beautiful face drooped over his.

"Papa," said a sweet musical voice, "I knew that I should find you here, and I know that you are thinking of me."

"You are right, Ethel; I am always thinking of you, my darling."

"Then your thoughts must be pleasant ones," said the girl, with the assured voice of one who knows she is dearly loved.

She laid her face against her father's; she kissed him and caressed him in her loving, half tender, half imperious fashion.

"I am come, papa," she said, "to make one more appeal to you—to ask you once more if it is not possible to induce you to give up these two plans—of your marriage, and my going to St. Ina's Bay."

"My dearest Ethel, I thought that matter was settled. I am sorry that you should renew the subject."

She unclasped her arms from his neck, and, going round, knelt down in front of him. Sir Leonard thought he had never seen anything so fair as her face in the moonlight.

"Papa, darling, I never prayed you to grant me a favor. You have been so kind and so good that there has been no need for me to ask, but I do pray you now to grant me this grace—do not think of marrying, and do not send me to St. Ina's."

Tears were shining brightly in her beautiful eyes as she raised them to him, and her voice trembled with emotion.

"I pray you, papa, by all your love for me—by all your kindness to me. I will make it all up to you; I will give you all the love of my heart; I will study your happiness

in every way ; I will think of nothing but you ; I will learn to be the most prudent, the most discreet, the most careful of housekeepers, I will learn to be anything you wish. From the very depths of my heart I pray you, dear papa, to grant me this grace."

Her voice was so earnest, her face so eloquent, that Sir Leonard was deeply moved.

" My dear Ethel, I really cannot accede to your wish ; the arrangement is made, and must be adhered to."

" I have never knelt to ask anything from you before, papa, and if you refuse, I never shall again. Out of the depths of my heart, with all the love and earnestness I have, I beg of you to think again before you decide irrevocably."

He was deeply distressed, and for a moment the possibility of acceding to her wishes occurred to him. Then the fair face of Helen Digby came before him, and the warnings that had been given him about Ethel's untutored ways and wilful manners returned to him with redoubled force. Ethel, watching his face intently, saw there no answer to her petition. She clung more closely to him, and laid her hand on his.

" Do listen to me, papa. I can see my life before me, as it were, and I am frightened to think of what will become of me if I am made miserable ; it is partly to save myself that I am here now. I can not brook control. I could not obey a stranger. I could not love any one who took my dead mother's place. I could not bear constraint and control now."

She paused one half minute, for the passion of her own words exhausted her.

" No good would come of it, papa," she cried. " The Gordons never bear control well, and I have a sure presentiment that evil would follow. My life would be dark and dreary. For my sake give it up, and trust to me."



Sir Leonard took the young girl in his arms ; he was pale and grave, as the moonlight showed him her beautiful face, wet with tears, and her lips quivering.

“ Ethel,” he said, with grave tenderness, “ when you were a little child, if you had asked me for a sharp sword as a plaything, do you think I should have given it to you ? ”

“ No ” she replied, “ certainly not.”

“ Now you ask me to place in your hands that which would be more destructive to you than a sharp sword. I cannot do it. I cannot consent to leave you alone, and I shall carry out my plans of marrying, that you may have the guidance of a good and wise woman.”

The pride that flashed into her face seemed quickly to dry her tears. She turned haughtily away from him.

“ You have refused my first petition, papa ; I shall never ask another. I tell you that evil will come of it, and I will prove to you that it would have been wiser and better to leave me alone.”

“ I hope you will do nothing rash, Ethel—nothing in the first impulse of anger.”

“ I shall live to hear you say, papa, that the most unfortunate day of my life was that on which you left me in Miss Digby’s charge.”

Yet she never dreamed how those words were to be verified, nor in what manner they would come true.

## CHAPTER VI.

FROM that moonlight night when her one great prayer had been refused, her wishes disregarded, her earnest supplication set aside, Ethel Gordon was completely changed. She had been gay, wilful, and defiant ; she had exercised her power with a half-laughing enjoyment of it ; but now all was altered. She laid no tragic plans, she thought of no revenge, she did not assume the airs of a tragedy queen, but it seemed as though the brightest part of her youth and beauty had faded from her.

Sir Leonard heard no more those sweet snatches of song which had once charmed him so completely ; he heard no more the low, silvery laughter which had been the very joy of his heart. Ethel grew grave, calm, and dignified ; she went through her duties as usual, but the laughing caprices, the repartees, the pretty, gay, graceful whims that had seemed part of herself, were all wanting now. Sir Leonard looked at her sadly, as one might at a bright-winged bird that had been grievously wounded.

She never resumed the subject of their past conversation ; whatever Sir Leonard said, she listened to without comment, making no reply to any of his hints about the beauty of St. Ina's Bay. His marriage was not as yet publicly discussed, but most people who learned what arrangement he had made guessed at it.

Ethel heard much of what was said—conjectures, remarks, expressions of wonder and approval—but she uttered no word. The beautiful face and the proud heart kept their own secret. She would have died a hundred deaths rather than betray how deeply she was wounded.

Sir Leonard thinking her silence a good sign, grew quite courageous. He rode over every day to see Miss Digby, yet Ethel never offered the least comment upon his absence. He took with him at times the most superb bouquets; she made no allusion to them. Once or twice he asked her to accompany him to Chantry Court; she complied, but even there she made no sign. When Miss Digby spoke to her, she answered with perfect composure and indifference. She sought for no communication with her, and she repelled none. She was calm, her manner full of proud, graceful nonchalance, and no one knew what an aching heart it veiled.

Miss Davencourt looked wonderingly at her. After she was gone, while the spell of her beautiful presence rested on her, she said to Miss Digby,—

“Either I have been mistaken in my estimate of Ethel Gordon’s character, or she is very much changed.”

Lady Davencourt, who overheard the remark, smiled.

“Rely upon it, Laura,” she said, “you have been mistaken. I do not think anything would ever change Ethel. She is the proudest girl I know, and nothing will ever make her less proud.”

“I should have imagined that she would resent instantly any attempt at setting her authority aside,” observed Laura.

Miss Digby said nothing, but thought deeply. She would almost have been better pleased if the young girl had shown some little resentment—if she had been angry or contemptuous; anything would have been better than this polished indifference, this nonchalant calm. Helen Digby never doubted in her own mind but that it covered the raging of a tempest.

Once, when Sir Leonard tried to revive the vexed topic, Ethel, looking at him quietly, said,—

“We had better not discuss the question, papa. What

must be, must be ; nothing further need be said about it. I find that words are very useless, after all."

After that Sir Leonard said no more.

June came round with its warmth, its sweetness of perfume, its bloom of roses and brightness of sun. One morning, quite unexpectedly, Sir Leonard received a telegram. The government business had been hastened, and he was to leave on the morrow for Austria.

"Ethel," he said, "here is news that I did not expect. I must leave you to-morrow."

The next moment he wished he had broken the news more gently to her, for her face grew white even to the very lips.

"To-morrow!" she repeated. "We have never been parted before. It is very sudden."

"I am very sorry," said Sir Leonard. "I wished to take you myself to St. Ina's ; that will not be possible now. I should have left you more happily if I had seen you safely there."

Ethel had recovered her calmness, but the color did not return to her face.

"Perhaps it is better as it is, papa. I shall leave my old home and you at the same time. Life will never be the same again for me."

"It will be happier, my darling," he interrupted ; and she, remembering how soon they were to be parted, repressed the quick retort that rose to her lips.

How she suffered during the remainder of that day, no one ever guessed ; the love, the pride, the sorrow that warred in her soul, the struggle between her love for her father, her grief at losing him, and the angry pride that forbade any expression of either love or grief—her hatred of the fair-faced, gentle lady who was to take her dead mother's place—her natural sorrow and reluctance at

parting with her old home, and laying down the crown she had worn so long—all rushed over her at once.

She had a long and bitter sorrow before her. She had to carry a burden that would have broken the heart of most women—she had a future before her from which the strongest heart might have shrunk in dismay and sorrow. But in that sad afterlife there was perhaps no day except one in which she suffered so terribly as she did now.

Sir Leonard was busily occupied; he had arrangements to make with his lawyer and his steward. The household was to be kept on as usual—none of the servants were to be parted with. The housekeeper was left in authority during the summer months, and the servants were told that in the autumn Miss Digby would return with Miss Gordon, and that from that time all authority must be considered as vested in the former's hands. There was some little murmuring—some little demur—but no one dared to utter a word.

It was evening when Sir Leonard rode away to Chantry Court.

“I shall make all arrangements for you, Ethel,” he said, “and I have no doubt Miss Digby will wish you to join her to-morrow.”

Her love for her father repressed the angry words which rose to her lips. She raised her colorless face to his.

“Do not think of me, papa,” she entreated; “think only of yourself.” He kissed the sweet, pale face.

“My darling Ethel,” he said, “I did not know how dearly I loved you until now. I thank Heaven that I can leave you in such excellent care.”

She made no reply. “I shall not have one minute's fear for you, Ethel,” he continued. “Under my charge, you might perhaps have committed some girlish imprudence, but under Miss Digby's that will be impossible. I have no hesitancy and no fear.”

He could not have spoken more unfortunate words, for they returned to her in the hour when the most subtle of all temptations was before her, and they turned the scale against her.

It was late when Sir Leonard returned, but she was waiting for him. He looked tired and pale, careworn and fatigued.

“I did not think you would sit up for me, my darling,” he said to Ethel. “I have made all arrangements for you, and you will be happy, I am sure. I have told Mr. Smithson that he is to make you an ample allowance for your own expenses, so that you will not be short of money; you can have more at any time by writing to me.”

She clasped her arms round his neck, and hid her white face on his breast.

“Do not talk to me about money, papa,” she said; “all the money in the world could not compensate me for one hour of your absence.”

“Miss Digby will drive over here to-morrow afternoon,” he observed, “and you will start at four for St. Ina’s. Heaven bless my darling, and make her happy there!”

At the sound of Miss Digby’s name her arms fell from him; she raised her face, and its tenderness deepened into gloom; all the memory of her wrongs seemed to rush over her at once; her very voice changed as she answered him.

“My greatest pleasure will be to hear from you, Ethel—to know that you are well and happy—to know that you are learning to like Miss Digby, and profiting by her society.”

An indignant flush covered her face, but he was going away, and she would not grieve him.

“Try to love her, Ethel, for my sake, and because the happiness of our household will depend upon your love, In two years you will have seen so much of her that you will know how to appreciate her.”

"Papa." cried the girl, in a very anguish of sorrow, "talk to me of yourself, now that you are going, not of her."

"I shall be away for only two years, Ethel," he continued, "and when I come back you will let me see my hopes accomplished. Let me find you—more beautiful you can never be—but more patient and gentle, more submissive—will you, darling? Correct the faults that through my carelessness have grown with your years. Let me find you gentle, obedient, all that my heart desires, and then I shall be richly repaid for all the sorrow of absence. Will you, for my sake, promise to become this, Ethel?"

There was a brief struggle between her intense love for her father and her passionate pride, but her pride carried the day. She turned from him.

"You will have others to think of when you return, papa."

"Yes, but none whom I love like you, Ethel" he replied sadly.

If either father or daughter could have foreseen what was to happen during those two years, it would have seemed to them more merciful that she should have died then and there.

## CHAPTER. VII.

IT was over—that terrible parting which had seemed to Ethel more bitter than death. Sir Leonard had delayed the fatal moment as long as he could. His daughter's white face and heavy eyes filled him with a keen sense of sorrow.

“I shall soon be back, my darling,” he said, trying to speak lightly; and then he broke down altogether, and tears filled his eyes, and his voice died on his lips. He said no more, but held his daughter in a close embrace: she was then the braver of the two.

“The years pass quickly,” she observed, “and you will be away for only two. Look at me, papa, so that you may remember the last look on my face was a smile.”

She did smile, poor child, with white quivering lips, but the smile was far more pitiful than any tears could have been. When Sir Leonard was gone, her self-control gave way; she flung herself on the thick grass and wept with passionate tears for the father who would never be the same to her again, for the home where she was no longer to act as mistress—wept for the power and position that were to be hers no more. It was bitterly hard, after absolute power, to be treated like a child. Passionate tears came from her which did not soften her heart, but hardened it against the lady whom she considered the chief cause of her sorrow.

She foresaw, with all the keen perception of youth, the change there would be in her life; and even during the first pang of grief for her father's loss, something like a re-



proach formed itself in her mind concerning his past treatment.

“Why,” she thought, “has he given me my unrestrained liberty for so many years, only to take it from me at last?”

Life did not seem to her, when she rose from the place where, in the wild tempest of grief, she had flung herself, to hold one single charm. She had loved her father; he was gone from her, and when he returned it would be to marry. She had loved her home, and her own fantastic rule there—that, too, had passed away. There was nothing before her but to submit to the rule of a strange woman. It was intolerably hard. She felt inclined to wish for death; but the Gordon pride came to her aid. Miss Digby was to be there by two; she must not find her weeping or sad. Ethel went to her room, and as far as she could, removed all trace of tears. She dressed herself with unusual care; she gave orders for the needful packing with a calm, clear, steady voice, and then sat down to await Miss Digby’s arrival.

“Henceforward,” she said to herself, “I am to be second in my father’s house. A stranger takes my mother’s place as well as mine. She will triumph over me; she will laugh to think how easily she has deposed me; but, suffer as I may, no sign of my suffering shall she discover.”

When Helen Digby arrived soon afterward, full of sympathy and kindness, ready to give all the attention and affection that she thought would be needed, her reception rather startled her. She would not allow any one to announce her.

“Tell me where Miss Gordon is,” she said, “and I will go to her.

She walked through the splendid suite of rooms where one day she was to reign as mistress. She found Ethel sitting in one of the pretty light balconies that looked on to

the terrace. She went gently to her, and laid her hand with a quiet, caressing touch on the girl's shoulder.

"My dearest Ethel," she said, "I have hastened to you knowing that you would be so lonely and unhappy. What can I do to comfort you?"

Her eyes shone brightly through her tears; her whole face was beautiful from its warmth and kindness. She saw the crimson flush rise on Ethel's brow. She would fain have taken the girl in her kind arms and kissed her face, but Ethel rose with quiet dignity, and said, coldly,—

"Good-morning, Miss Digby; I did not expect you so soon."

"I feared you might be lonely, Ethel, so I hastened to you."

"Thank you," was the dignified reply. "I shall feel lonely until papa returns, and no one can comfort me."

But Miss Digby was not to be repulsed easily; she sat down by Ethel's side, and would not notice the girl's shrinking from her.

"I hope that the plan of going to St. Ina's to-day pleases you, Ethel," she said, gently; "I suggested it to Sir Leonard because I thought the sooner you left Fountayne the better. Can I do anything to help you to pack or prepare for the journey?"

"My maid has done that already, I thank you," returned Ethel.

"Is there anything I can do to make you happier—to lessen your sorrow—to make the time pass more cheerfully?"

"Nothing, I thank you," was the chilling reply.

But Miss Digby was not to be daunted. Some would have turned from the cold, averted face, and have left Ethel to herself—not so Helen—she was faithful to her trust.

"I wish, Ethel," she said, "that I had the gift of elo-

quence. I should like to tell you some of the thoughts that are passing through my mind—how anxious I am for your happiness and welfare, how gravely I look upon the precious charge that your father has intrusted to me, how ready I am to wait upon you, to render you every service in my power by night or day—indeed to devote my time, my thoughts, all to you.”

“I thank you,” responded Ethel, still more coldly.

It was hard to resist such kindness, but the woman who offered it was the one who intended to usurp her place in her father’s heart and in his home. She would have suffered anything rather than accept it, just as she would have suffered anything rather than allow Helen Digby to note her pain.

“I do not wonder that you should regret leaving Fountayne,” said the gentle voice again; “it is a beautiful place.”

Not to Miss Digby would she admit even the least regret.

“Change is always pleasant, I believe,” she returned; “Fountayne is not the only beautiful place in the world.”

She would not say how dearly she loved it, how perfect she thought it, nor how for the remainder of her life a dark cloud would hang over it. It would no longer be her home—sacred to herself and those she loved; it would be desecrated by strangers, spoiled by the new rule and the new love her father would bring thither.

With a wistful smile Helen Digby looked at the beautiful, defiant face.

“How am I to reach your proud heart, Ethel?” she inquired. “How am I to soften you and make you believe in my sincerity?”

“I do not see that your sincerity concerns me,” replied Ethel, haughtily. “Do you not think, Miss Digby, that it is time we began our preparations? You will pardon me, perhaps, if I leave you.”

It was not anger that flushed the face of Helen Digby—no feeling of anger rose in her heart against the spoiled child who resented her coming so greatly—nothing but a profound sense of pity, which moved her almost to tears. Ethel's calmness did not deceive her. She understood perfectly the cold exterior.

"If I could but win her liking!" she thought.

But it was not to be. Ethel bade farewell to the servants, who seemed grieved and distressed at parting with her. She said farewell to the home where for so many years she had been beloved and happy. It was a bright afternoon when she left Fountayne; and unconsciously, she left the brightness and happiness of her life behind her.

They had a pleasant journey through the beautiful country that lay between Fountayne and St. Ina's Bay. During the greater part of the time Ethel looked out of the carriage windows; it was impossible, from her beautiful, cold, indifferent face, to guess the nature of her thoughts. At the different stations where they stopped, people looked in wonder at the lovely girl whose proud, bright eyes seemed to glance at everything so calmly and indifferently, whom nothing seemed to interest, who received with such haughty nonchalance all the admiring glances bent on her. What were they worth? What was all the world to her, whose heart was aching with a storm of pride, sorrow, and love?

Ethel was not wanting in politeness to Miss Digby; she replied to all her remarks, and with quiet grace received every little attention the elder lady offered her. Helen Digby would rather have seen her angry, sullen, impatient—anything rather than so coldly indifferent. It was useless to try to move her. Helen made no more attempts to win her confidence. "It will come in time," she thought; "I shall only make her angry if I persevere."

Ethel, preserving the calm on her face, allowed the dark, evil spirit of hatred to enter her heart ; sitting there outwardly calm, her face cold and severe, her words few and colder still, there was a fitful volcano of wrath in her soul. She felt angry, fiercely angry, with her father, Helen Digby, and all the world besides ; it was anger that could find no vent in words—that would not seek relief in speech. Yet Ethel Gordon was naturally a noble girl, proud and generous of nature, frank, truthful, and pure of soul ; but she had been badly trained. She had been allowed to grow up with her faults unchecked, and the after result was long years of bitter, unavailing sorrow such as fall to the lot of few.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE Queen's Hotel at St. Ina's Bay was different from other places of the kind. St. Ina's itself was a pretty, picturesque town, built at the foot of cliffs almost hidden by green foliage. The broad expanse of blue water, the golden sands, the winding walks up the cliffs, the pure salt breeze, the quiet that seemed to shield the pretty town, attracted visitors—but they were of a peculiar kind. There were no brass bands to enliven the promenades, there was no pier, there were no assembly-rooms or circulating libraries with their facilities for gossip and flirtation ; St. Ina's had none of those seaside attractions. The visitors who came thither were grave, elderly people, tired of the noise and bustle of the world, thoughtful men who came to study, artists who wanted smiling, sunny landscapes, the wearied and sorrowful who wished for rest.

No place in England was less known than St. Ina's Bay. If any one wished, for any reason whatsoever, to find seclusion—to be, as it were, out of the world—the only thing needful was a visit to St. Ina's Bay. No newspaper, with its tell-tale column of visitors, was ever published there. People came to St. Ina's, remained there for a few weeks or months, and then away, and no one, perhaps, except the mistress of the house where they had been staying, ever knew their names.

The Queen's Hotel had once been St. Ina's Hall, the residence of a wealthy gentleman, who at his death left orders that it should be sold, and the proceeds from the sale divided among the London hospitals. It was pur-

chased by a company, who decided to transform it into a first-class hotel. It was a grand old mansion, standing in the midst of fine grounds. There were a small pine-wood which ran down to the sea, and a broad, deep lake with water-lilies floating on its calm breast ; there were groves formed by blossoming lime-trees, and large cedars, the shade of which formed a most beautiful summer retreat ; there were picturesque paths under the trees, where flowers grew in richest abundance ; there were graceful fountains, the silvery spray of which rose high amid the dark-green foliage.

The Queen's Hotel was one of the fairest homes in England, but as a commercial speculation it had completely failed. The company had offered it several times for sale, but no one seemed to care in the least about buying it ; so that from year to year it struggled on, sometimes paying its expenses, but more often leaving a deficiency for the company to meet. Some of the shareholders had suggested building a pier and a library ; others declared that it was useless " to throw good money after bad. "

Notwithstanding this commercial drawback, the Queen's Hotel was a favorite resort with those who wished for quiet and repose. Miss Digby had chosen it because her most intimate friend, Lady Stafton, was staying there. To those who cared only for a beautiful sea, picturesque scenery, pure, bracing air, and quiet, it was the finest spot in England. Those who wished for society would find none there.

The rooms were large and lofty, the corridors broad and light ; the hotel, as a whole, was quiet and peaceful as any gentleman's house. Ethel could not help liking the aspect of the place, although the silence and loneliness somewhat dismayed her.

" I thought, " she said to Miss Digby, " that hotels were always full of people ; this seems quite empty. "

“It was for that reason I selected it,” replied the elder lady. “I have been here several times, and have enjoyed as much privacy as though I had been in my own home. I hope you will not dislike the quiet, Ethel.”

“It is a matter of but little moment to me—all places are alike,” returned Miss Gordon.

Yet, after a few days, she found the life not unpleasant. Miss Digby left her very much to her own devices. She had wished, at first, that they should share the same rooms; but Ethel’s manner convinced her how unpleasant she would consider such an arrangement, so separate suites were ordered—one for Miss Gordon, and one for Miss Digby. Miss Digby’s rooms were close to those occupied by Lady Stafton.

It was not an unpleasant life, but coming there at all was a mistake. Ethel was young; she had been accustomed to a life of constant activity, to plenty of society, to the occupation and excitement always attending the management of a large house; now she had nothing to fall back upon, nothing to distract her thoughts, nothing to do but to muse by night and by day on the injury she imagined Helen Digby to have done her.

It was hardly the life to have chosen for a young, beautiful, gifted, imaginative girl; for once, clear, calm-judging Helen Digby had made a mistake. She would have done far better to take Ethel to some seaside resort, where the world would have roused her from her morbid thought, and have restored her gayety, her animation, and her high spirits.

For the first time in her life Ethel Gordon found herself alone; for she had shunned and avoided Miss Digby as much as possible. She had been accustomed to the homage and attention of a large household, to the tender love of a father who never neglected her; now she was alone, with strange faces around her, strange voices in



her ear. She had been accustomed to be first ; everything and every one had depended on her ; now it was otherwise. She had no power and no influence. No one consulted her, her opinion was never sought. Lady Stafton had given Helen Digby what she considered sound advice.

“I see exactly how matters stand,” she said, “and my counsel to you is—leave the young girl alone. Your kindness must in the end make its way. With a haughty disposition like hers, the best way is to treat her with kindly indifference. The time will come when she will seek you, not you her.”

And Helen, hoping it would be for the best, watched the beautiful face in silence, looking day by day for some little mark of affection, but never receiving it—hoping that all would end well, yet turning away with a shuddering dread lest evil might follow.

It was something like hatred that Ethel felt for the lady who was to take her place. It was hard enough to lose her father, to be away from Fountayne, but it was harder still to know that when, he returned he would belong to some one else, that he would give all the love, the care, the thought that she had valued so highly to another.

If something would but happen to prevent the marriage ! Yet she wished no particular harm to Miss Digby. If by raising her finger she could have injured her, she would not for worlds have done so ; but she longed for something to happen—something that should lower Miss Digby in her father’s estimation—that should make him think less highly of her prudence and her discretion.

Self-engrossed as the visitors were, they could not fail to notice the beautiful, wistful face of the girl, with its listless, weary expression ; she appeared so young—she was only just seventeen—yet her features had a tired look as though she had not found life very bright.

The sweet summer days glided on. Ethel and Miss Digby met always at breakfast, which was served in the ladies' room. At first Helen Digby had made an effort to spend the days with her young charge. Ethel would not have it so; she would either retreat to her own pretty sitting-room, or say distinctly that she was going out, and wished to be alone. If the place had been more frequented, Miss Digby would never have allowed the young girl to fall into the habit of wandering alone; but, as Lady Stafton said—and Miss Digby agreed with her—Ethel might walk about the cliffs for years in St. Ina's and not meet any one. There could be no danger, and it pleased her, so Miss Digby did not interfere.

## CHAPTER IX.

It was a warm, beautiful evening; the sea-breeze swept over the pine-woods, and mingled with the perfume of the flowers; the waves broke and spread out in great sheets of white foam—they rose and fell like the change in some grand harmony. The sun shone over the sea until it resembled a sheet of heaving, restless, glittering gold.

On the lawn of the hotel the visitors were standing or sitting in little groups—some watching the shining sea, others, despite the beauty of earth and sky, deeply engrossed in books, others in conversation. Miss Digby was with Lady Stafton. They were watching the waves, and Ethel sat near them, the fairest picture on which the bright sun shone. The evening was warm, and she wore a white dress of some shining material, richly trimmed with gold fringe—a fantastic dress; but Ethel was an artist in dress as in everything else. The dress was fastened round the slender waist by a gold band, and fell in graceful folds to the pretty feet. The square-cut bodice gave a glimpse of a beautiful neck, white and well molded; a red rose nestled close to it. The luxuriant waves of rich brown hair were loosely arranged—they were gathered back from the fair brow, and fastened with a golden arrow; a rose lay in their sunny depths. No fairer picture was ever conceived by an artist, or set forth by a poet.

Ethel was not joining in the conversation—her eyes lingered on the golden, glittering sea. She was wishing that she was far away over the restless waters—that she was in any other place and with any other people. Those

who passed near her wondered at the listless expression of the beautiful young face. Her folded hands lay still. But for the faint stir in the leaves of the red rose, as it rose and fell with each breath, one might have fancied her sleeping.

Little did she imagine that she was keenly watched by a pair of dark eyes that belonged to a handsome *debonnair* face. That same evening had brought a stranger to the Queen's Hotel, who wrote his name Laurie Nugent, Esq., and who seemed to have a well-filled purse, and was on that account made very welcome by the manager and his satellites. Mr. Nugent had declined to enter the larger dining-room, where most of the guests were dining, but he had ordered a *recherche* little repast to be served to him in his own room. Then he asked to look at the visitors' book ; the manager, with a low bow, showed it to him.

"Shall you have many more guests this season, do you think?" asked Mr. Nugent, with a careless smile.

No, the manager feared not. They had been pretty fortunate in May; in June they had had very few; July, still fewer; and it was seldom that any one came in August. A satisfied expression came over the handsome face.

"I think it is very probable," said Mr. Nugent, "that if I like the place, I may remain here for some little time."

The manager was pleased to hear it, paid great attention to the wines selected for the stranger's dinner, and told him how pleasantly the evenings could be spent in the grounds. Mr. Nugent went thither; he looked indifferently on the clear waters and the blue sky, but a sudden fire flashed in his eyes as they fell upon the features of Ethel Gordon sitting under the lime-trees.

"What a beautiful girl!" he thought to himself. "Who is she?"

He stood still and, watched her with charmed eyes.

He noticed the proud carriage of the rich brown head, the superb beauty of the girlish face, the grace and symmetry of the perfect figure.

“Who is she?” he repeated. “And what can she be doing here?”

Still watching her intently, he noted how indifferent she was to everything around her—how motionless she sat, her eyes never for one moment leaving the great expanse of water. He noted the tired, listless expression on the exquisite face—the shadow in the beautiful eyes.

“She is not happy,” he said to himself. “If she were—if her eyes were lighted up and her lips smiled—she would be simply irresistible. What can make her look so sad? At her age she ought to be all smiles and blushes.”

Once he saw the two ladies near her address her. She raised her eyes, but no light came into them, and when she had replied to the questions asked, they turned again toward the lake.

“Those are her friends, and she does not like them—she is not happy with them,” was his second comment.

Then he watched her again, until the evening began to close around them, and the three ladies went in.

“I shall never rest until I know who she is and all about her,” he said to himself. “I hardly like to own such a thing—I who have seen some of the loveliest girls in England, and cared for none of them—but I believe, honestly, I am in love at last.”

He laughed to himself, and, though his mouth was handsome, that laugh was not pleasant to hear.

“It would be a strange thing,” he mused, “and shows the expediency of taking fortune at the right turn.”

Mr. Nugent remained in the grounds until the dew fell on the grass and flowers, and then went slowly indoors. A handsome fee that brightened the waiter's face, and a few discreet questions, so adroitly asked that they seemed per-

fectly innocent, obtained for him all the information that he required.

“Ethel Gordon,” he muttered to himself—“the beautiful name suits the beautiful face.” He repeated it again and again. “Ethel Gordon—Ethel, with the sad sweet eyes and the sad sweet face—if I could only make her love me—if I could only win one smile from her—sweet Ethel Gordon.”

The name seemed to have a charm for him. He fell asleep that night repeating it as one repeats the words of some haunting song.

The next morning he rose early. Out in the grounds he gathered a bouquet of fairest roses ; the dew was lying on them, and every leaf seemed full of perfume. With another bribe, even heavier than the first, the waiter consented to have the bouquet conveyed to Miss Gordon's room.

“Be particular, and do not mention from whom you received it.”

The waiter in his turn bribed a chambermaid ; and, when Ethel rose, one of the first things she saw upon her toilet-table was a superb bouquet of roses, and on the paper infolding them she read, in strange, quaint characters, the words, “Sweets to the sweet.” She took up the roses, and looked at them wonderingly. Who had cared sufficiently for her to send her these? She had been at the hotel so many weeks, and no one had ever appeared to recognize her. Who had risen to gather these beautiful roses for her? Who had written those pretty words—“Sweets to the sweet.”

It did not enter her mind that it was an admirer, a lover. Such a possibility never occurred to Ethel. That some day there would come to her a vague, beautiful dream called love she felt intuitively ; that there would come a fairy prince, who would change all the world for her, making it

doubly fair and doubly bright, she also felt, and she thought of it with a softened light in her eyes and a crimson blush on her fair face. The happy time would come, for it came once in every one's life—when, she did not know. She had felt no want in her life ; her father's love and her own pretty, fantastic will had more than filled it. No voice in her heart had cried out to her that her life was unfinished because love had formed no part of it. The joyous time would come, sooner or later and that beautiful, distant golden future had a greater charm for her than flirtations and lovers had for other girls.

The grandest heritage of women was not hers yet—the love that suffers, that endures, that brings with it keenest pain—the love that makes of this world a paradise or a purgatory—the love that crowns a woman's life or brings with it certain death. No warning came to her from the sweet dewy roses, or each fragrant leaf might have cried, “Beware ! beware !”

Mr. Nugent had rightly guessed that Miss Gordon was too proud to question the servants about the sender of the flowers. She held them in her white hands, she inhaled their luscious perfume ; she kissed the sweet crimson leaves.

“You come from a friend,” she said ; “therefore you are welcome.”

She hesitated shyly whether she should place one of them in her belt or in her hair ; and shyness gained the day. She left them in her room, but all day it seemed to her that she had a friend near at hand.

Laurie Nugent laid his plans. He had determined upon a floral siege ; if Miss Gordon were inclined to romance—as from her face he expected—this silent fragrant wooing would have a great charm for her, He watched her that day in silent admiration, yet keeping out of her sight.

The next morning Ethel found on her table a bouquet of lilies, fair, white, and odorous, but on the paper that in-folded them was written no word. Her wonder increased. Who was there that cared enough about her to send her such lovely flowers? It could not be Miss Digby.

“I should hate them if I thought they came from her,” she said to herself.

Her face flushed, and her eyes flashed. She would have trampled the delicate lilies under foot if Helen Digby’s hand had gathered them. But it could not be so. Miss Digby was kind, courteous, and graceful; still she would never have thought of anything so sentimental as sending flowers steeped in the early morning dew.

On the morning following there came a bouquet more beautiful still, it was composed of large, rich, velvety heartseases; and then Ethel’s suspicions were aroused. It must be some one who admired her. Yet she had seen no one. There were one or two ladies and two or three elderly married gentlemen staying at the hotel. It could be none of those. Who was it sent the flowers? Ethel resolved on that, the third day of receiving them, to look carefully around and take more interest in the living world.



## CHAPTER X.

THE morning was too warm for the residents at the Queen's Hotel to remain indoors, and the sea-breeze was fresh enough to moderate the heat of the sun. The air seemed filled with a golden haze ; it was almost faint, too, with perfume. The aromatic odor of the pine-woods mingled with the fragrance of the lily and the rose ; the bright-winged butterflies and honey-bees hovered round the flowers. All Nature seemed languid in the great warmth ; the leaves of the trees never stirred—the flowers were still.

The ladies had brought out their books and fancy-work ; they were sitting under the trees where the sea-breeze could reach them. Miss Digby and Lady Stafton were each busily and happily engaged in the making of some beautiful and delicate point-lace ; Ethel had brought out a volume of poems, but she did not read much—her attention was fixed on the various groups. She saw no one among them, however, who would be likely to send her flowers.

Presently a little dog, belonging to one of the ladies, ran barking up to Miss Digby and disarranged her work. She had a nervous fear of dogs, and uttered a little cry of dismay when she saw it. The next moment a shadow fell between her and the sunshine, and a steady, strong hand drew the dog away. Looking up, Miss Digby saw a tall, handsome man, who smiled as he bowed.

"I trust you are not frightened, madam," he said ; "dogs should not be allowed to go unmuzzled during these fearfully hot days."

Lady Stafton smiled—Miss Digby looked slightly confused.

“I ought to be ashamed to confess it,” she said, “but I am very much afraid of them in all weathers.”

The new-comer should then, perhaps, have left them, but he seemed disposed to linger: and in this pleasant *al fresco* hotel life Lady Stafton did not think it needful to observe the strict laws of etiquette. The trio fell into a pleasant conversation, the stranger speaking principally of St. Ina’s Bay. Miss Digby agreed with much that he said, and during all the time he never once looked at Ethel. He never looked at her, but he was conscious of her every movement. He knew that the bright, proud eyes were looking at him—he knew that the beautiful face was turned to him—but he assumed the most profound unconsciousness.

“Are you staying here for any time?” he asked Miss Digby.

“Yes,” she replied, “we shall remain until the end of the autumn.”

“It seems to be a very quiet place,” he remarked. “I can hardly imagine any one staying here except in search of health.”

Lady Stafton smiled.

“I hope you are not in search of health?” she said.

The handsome, *debonnair* face flushed faintly.

“I am indeed,” he confessed. “I have been over-studying, and my doctor recommended me to take a few weeks’ entire rest. He also recommended a quiet place, so I chose St. Ina’s Bay.”

“You could not have done better,” observed Miss Digby; and then she smiled, for the stranger’s eyes were fixed on her with such a wistful expression that she could almost guess what was coming.

“If you would not think me intrusive,” said the

stranger, "I should like to ask permission to introduce myself. I have been so lonely here during the last few days that I should esteem it the greatest honor and the greatest pleasure to be allowed to have the privilege of speaking to you sometimes. My name is Laurie Nugent. Lady Stafton, I have had the pleasure of seeing you in London at Lady Delamaine's."

It was quite a random shot—Mr. Nugent knew that Lady Delamaine was a great leader of fashion, but he had never entered her house—yet it quite satisfied Lady Stafton.

"You know Lady Delamaine?" she said. "She is my dearest friend. Are you one of the Nugents of Flintshire?"

"I am related to them," he replied; "but I have not seen much of them."

It was so carelessly said that the impression left on his hearers was that he considered himself socially the superior of the Nugents of Flintshire.

Then Lady Stafton asked him many questions concerning people in London whom she supposed him—as a friend of Lady Delamaine's—to know, all of which he answered with aplomb and self-possession. His pleasant small-talk amused them, and the bright, sunny morning seemed the brighter to Ethel for his being there. Still, he had never looked at her, but his position with the two elderly ladies being secure, he thought he might venture to steal one glance at her. He met the most beautiful and the frankest eyes that he had ever seen; they were looking intently at him, the golden light in their rich depths deepening as she looked. He thought it wiser on that occasion to restrict his attentions entirely to the elder ladies.

"If I spoke to her now," he thought, "they would suspect that I had taken all this trouble for her sake."

One glance of admiration, full of fire, full of passion, seemed to flash from the depths of his eyes to hers. He saw

her face grow crimson, and then he dared not trust himself to look again. But that one glance had sufficed to trouble the calm, still depths of Ethel's young heart.

Suddenly an idea flashed across her that this stranger, this handsome man, whose dark eyes had seemed to flash that strange glance into hers, was the one who had sent the flowers. She could not tell why she thought so, but it was impossible now to doubt it. Would the next morning bring the floral offering? She almost longed for morning to come that she might see it.

Laurie Nugent was wise enough to see that he must not presume upon the kindness of the ladies. He passed them several times that day; on each occasion it was with a polite bow, but without a word.

Lady Stafton commented upon his discreet, well-bred manner.

"Some men would have been insufferable after our kindness," she said, laughingly, to Miss Digby; "but he really seems almost timid, and afraid of intruding. I am rather inclined to like him, Helen."

Miss Digby looked at him—he was walking down the terrace.

"I do not know," she returned, half-doubtfully; "there is something in his face that I can hardly like or trust."

"His face is handsome enough," observed Lady Stafton.

"There is something in it I cannot tell what—that does not please me," opposed Miss Digby. "It is not a face that I should trust."

Ethel was listening intently to the conversation; as usual, the spirit of contradiction was aroused within her. Whatever Miss Digby said must be wrong. She said nothing, but resolved in her mind to show her disbelief in Miss Digby's words. A false face! It was the handsomest she had ever seen—and the remembrance of that

One glance from the dark eyes made her heart beat. It was a break in the monotony of her life—it was something agreeable to think of—the first dawning of that sun that was to shine so brightly for a time, and then destroy her.

Laurie Nugent succeeded beyond his wildest hopes. "Fortune attends those who know how to wait," he said to himself, and he never lost sight of the fact; he knew how to wait with patience. For the next two or three days he devoted himself exclusively to Lady Stafton and Miss Digby, only acknowledging by a bow the presence of the beautiful Ethel. He was well satisfied with the progress he had made, when one day, as he was talking to Lady Stafton, Ethel came to ask some question which Miss Digby required to be answered. Then Mr. Nugent looked from one to the other in such evident expectation of an introduction that the elder lady could not possibly refuse it.

There were few words spoken when Ethel Gordon was introduced to her fate, but those few were as a death-warrant. Mr. Nugent bowed low, murmured something which she did not hear plainly; her heart beat, her hands trembled, the proud, frank eyes drooped before his, and the beautiful face flushed, and then grew strangely pale. It was almost a solemn moment to her, for it seemed like the completion of some vague, beautiful dream.

It was a relief to her to hasten away, and then Lady Stafton wondered if she had done a wise thing.

"It must be all right," she said. "He is Lady Delamaine's friend. If he were not a man of good means, he would not be staying here—a gentleman I know him to be—besides, he shows no sign of admiring Ethel Gordon."

She forgot all about the introduction a few minutes afterward, and Laurie Nugent smiled to think how easily he had succeeded in winning all he wanted. He could speak to Miss Gordon now, when he met her in the grounds,

without any breach of etiquette ; and already he had grown to love her so dearly, so entirely, that speaking to her became the one great need of his life.

For he owned the mastery of the passionate love that had taken possession of him so suddenly. He had at first admired only the beautiful face he had looked at, but, watching it until its loveliness had stolen into his heart, he learned to love it with a force and intensity that frightened himself.

Love came to Laurie Nugent like a fierce tornado, that swayed his heart and soul as the whirlwind sways the trees. He said to himself that, cost what it would, let his life be what it might, let right or wrong rule, let the price be high or low, he would win her, he would make her his own. There was nothing that he would not have done to succeed ; he would have hesitated at no crime, stopped at no wrong. With such a love there was little chance of escape for its object.

## CHAPTER XI.

MISS DIGBY had not succeeded in the dearest wish of her heart—the wish to win the confidence of Ethel Gordon. She had not even won from her the least portion of liking Day by day, as she felt deeper regret at parting from her father, at losing her position at home, Ethel felt a greater dislike to Helen Digby—she was not even just to her.

“But for her,” she thought, “my father would not have been so anxious to make money; but for her, he might have remained in England, and we should have been happy for long years in our old fashion. I shall never be to him again what I have been; my love will never fill his life as it used.”

As these thoughts gained upon her, her dislike to Helen Digby increased; and the unfortunate idea returned to her that, if Sir Leonard could only be brought to think less highly of his betrothed, he would very probably abandon all thought of the marriage; and that idea, in the end, helped her to her sorrowful fate.

Early in August letters came from Sir Leonard. There was one for Miss Digby, whose kind, calm face flushed with pleasure as she read it; and one for Ethel, who put it quietly away—she would not read it in the presence of her rival. Helen Digby opened hers at once.

“Ethel,” she said, looking up with bright eyes, “I am so pleased, Sir Leonard has reached Vienna, and is both well and happy.”

Not to the rival whom she detested would Ethel condescend to say how glad and happy such news made her. She returned some indifferent reply, which Miss Digby quite understood.

“She is too proud, and dislikes me too much even to say that she is pleased,” thought the lady.

But Ethel’s exhibition of her unconquered feelings did not prevent Miss Digby from saying kindly,—

“Will you not read your letter now, Ethel? It may contain some news of interest.”

“Thank you, I will wait;” and Ethel finished her breakfast leisurely, as though no unsealed letters were waiting to be read.

Helen Digby sighed deeply as the young girl left the room.

“If she would but be less proud, less reserved with me—if she would but learn to like me, even ever so little—I should not have a cloud in my sky.”

Ethel went out that she might read her letter without interruption, and the spot she chose was a lovely little nook at the end of the avenue of lime-trees, where the clover grew thick and fragrant, where wild roses and harebells stirred their sweet blossoms in the sighing wind, and where the thick foliage of the trees met overhead and formed an arch beautiful as that of any cathedral aisle. One of the trees had fallen long years ago; it lay now stretched across the path; moss and ivy covered it, sprays of wild flowers clung to it, and this little nook, beautiful and solitary as though it belonged to some other sphere, was Ethel’s favorite resort,

Thither she went now to read Sir Leonard’s letter. She kissed the seal that bore his crest—the place where she thought his hand had rested—and then opened the missive. A deep shadow came over the beautiful face as she read. The girl’s heart was hungering for love, for sympathy. She had hoped her father would write of both, but the letter was one long exhortation, one long piece of advice, and all concerning Miss Digby.

He hoped she had learned to love her, to obey her, to



look forward with pleasure to the happy life he anticipated they would all spend together. He hoped she profited by Miss Digby's teachings, by her constant intercourse with one so amiable, so well-bred, and lady-like.

A bitter smile curved the proud lips as she read, bitter scorn and anger flushed her proud face.

"Does he expect that I find her perfect as he does—the woman who is to take my mother's place—who is to usurp my own?"

Bitter, angry thoughts surged through the girl's heart, which ached with keenest pain. So, although he was away from her, although for the first time in their lives they had been parted, his thoughts were all with this stranger who was henceforth to stand between them! It was one of the most miserable hours of her life.

"I had thought so much of his writing to me," she said to herself, with something like a sob; "and, now that I have his letter, there is no pleasure, no comfort in it—it is full of her. She darkens the world for me."

Then, as though in condemnation of such a thought, the wind seized one of the sheets of paper, and whirled it from her hands.

The next moment a pair of dark eyes were looking into hers, and Laurie Nugent, standing with her lost sheet of paper in his hand, was bowing before her.

"I must thank this letter, Miss Gordon," he said, "for an opportunity I have long sought—the opportunity of speaking to you."

She took the letter from him, with a few murmured words of thanks; and then Laurie Nugent, who had braved more dangers than most men, stood quite at a loss what to say next. He had imagined himself alone with her a thousand times and in his fancy he was always pouring out floods of eloquent words—she listening with drooping eyes and flushed face. Now the reality for which he had longed

was his, and he stood before her in silence, the words trembling on his lips, and his heart beating with an unknown fear, a strange awe upon him—for her beauty had completely overpowered him, and left him unable to speak.

She was the first to recover herself. It was new to her to see a tall, handsome man disconcerted by her. She raised her frank, proud eyes to his face, and then he saw the traces of bitter tears.

“Miss Gordon,” he cried, hastily, “you have had bad news, I am afraid. You have been grieving over something in your letter.

His voice, so full of sympathy, seemed to touch her. A sudden impulse of confidence in this stranger seized her.

“You are right,” she said. “I have been longing for the letter, and now that it has come I am disappointed.”

Her lips quivered, and the strong effort she was making to control herself drove the color from her face. He sat down by her side. The sight of that beautiful pale face seemed to give him courage.

“How I wish I were not a stranger,” he said “that I might be able to help you—to say something that might console you.”

“I am ashamed of myself,” confessed Ethel—“most bitterly ashamed ; but my disappointment has been great.”

“Let me try to help you to forget it,” he said. “This beautiful world is smiling all around us, there is a bright sky above—let us enjoy them for a time, and forget trouble.”

With firm, gentle touch, which she made no attempt to resist, he took the closely written sheets from her, folded them carefully, and then gave them back to her.

“Place the cause of annoyance out of sight, Miss Gordon, and you will forget it; that is true philosophy, and the proper method of managing all things disagreeable.”

His peremptory manner rather pleased her than otherwise; she looked up at him with a frank, fearless smile.

“Do you think so, Mr. Nugent? I do not quite agree with you. I should bring all disagreeable things to the front, look them boldly in the face. To brave battle with them, and vanquish them one by one—that seems to me truer philosophy than yours.”

It was so, and the remark showed plainly as words could show, the difference between speaker and listener.

“I will learn any kind of philosophy you may choose to teach me, Miss Gordon,” returned Laurie Nugent; “you shall find me the most obedient of scholars. I would believe all you told me, do all you bade me, think as you thought, speak as you spoke, in hope of but one reward.”

“What might that reward be?” she asked smiling.

“One kind look from you, and one kind word—all earth could give me no greater reward than that.”

It was pleasant to sit there and hear such kind words; it was pleasant to read the admiration so plainly revealed in those dark eyes; it was the first gleam of happiness Ethel had known since Sir Leonard first imparted to her the fact of his intended marriage. The whole scene was so fair that it lived in her memory long after years of suffering had blotted out other pictures. Ethel—proud, frank, beautiful Ethel—sat drinking in the first deep luscious draught of the cup that was to prove but deadly poison. For the first time in her young life she listened to the unmeasured words of flattering love, and they did not displease her.

Laurie Nugent was a clever man, quick of comprehension; he had the great gift of understanding character and of adapting himself to the people into whose midst he was thrown. He misused the gift terribly—even fatally; but he had it and used it like a charm. Although he had exchanged but a few indifferent words with Ethel, he under-

stood her perfectly ; he did not know how she came to be associated with Miss Digby, or whether they were related, but he saw plainly enough that Ethel did not like her, and never felt at ease with her. He showed his adroitness when, after talking to her for some minutes, he asked, with a careless smile,—

“ Where is Miss Digby this morning ? I have not seen her.”

“ She is writing letters,” replied Ethel ; and the remembrance of the letter she was writing darkened the beautiful face and shadowed the sweet, bright eyes.

“ I am glad to hear it,” he remarked, with a careless laugh. “ I am grateful to those letters ; but for them Miss Digby would be here, I suppose—and I have an idea that she does not like me.”

If he had thought the matter over for months he could not have said anything more likely to answer his purpose than that ; all the love, the flattery, the eloquence was as nothing compared to those magical words. He saw the fair, girlish face blush, and he knew they had taken effect.

“ Miss Digby not like you ? ” she questioned, slowly. “ Are you sure of that ? How do you know it ? ”

“ I know it by instinct,” he replied ; “ I cannot explain more fully.”

He knew that in her own mind she was saying to herself that she, Ethel Gordon, would like him, if only out of opposition to Helen Digby ; yet he was too wise and too wary to pursue the subject.

“ My idea is that we cannot control our likes and dislikes,” he added, “ but that they are instinctive. I see some persons, and my heart goes out to them with a warmth of friendliness which words are weak to express. I see others, and do not even like them, but shun them if I can.”

She was looking intently at him.

"I am glad you say so," she observed; "my experience is the same. I find that, if at first I take a dislike to any one, I seldom overcome it."

He would not let her see how great was his curiosity about everything connected with her. He was longing to know why she was there, how it was that she was associated with Miss Digby, to what family of Gordons she belonged; but all these things, he said to himself, he must learn by degrees.

He pointed to the pretty harebells growing at her feet.

"Do you know the legend attached to these flowers?" he asked.

"No. I have not heard it."

"It is said that in the depths of each of these little bells a fairy resides, and that on quiet moonlight nights each little elf leaves its home, and that together they all ring their bells with a peculiar chime. It is said that travellers belated in the woods have heard the sweet, faint fairy music, and have wondered what it was."

Her face brightened, and the golden light deepened in her eyes.

"It is long since I have heard any pretty legends," she said; "tell me some more."

His memory must have been well stored with many a quaint and graceful fable. He told her German legends of the dark forests and of the spirits who lived in the grand old trees—of the elf-king who rides on the night wind, of the water-spirits who dwell in the streams; he told her many a fair legend of Grecian lore, of the daphne and narcissus, of the hyacinth and the rose—stories that took her imagination captive, and charmed the artistic, beauty loving mind. She forgot that he was a stranger; she sat with clasped hands, looking into his face, drinking in each word as it fell from his lips.

“You must be a poet,” said the girl, simply; and for a moment an expression that she could not understand crossed his face. Was it regret, remorse, pity or hesitation? She could not tell, and almost as soon as she had noticed it it was gone.

“I am not a poet, Miss Gordon, but I admire poetry, and these old legends have always had a great charm for me. You judge me too favorably. I am a man of the world—not a poet.”

She repeated the words after him.

“A man of the world—that means a man clever and shrewd in judgment, quick, versatile, and accomplished, does it not?” she asked.

“Viewed favorably—yes,” he replied. “But there is one thing, Miss Gordon, which makes every man a poet for the time.”

“What is that?” she asked.

“Love for a fair and noble woman. Love is poetry—it is the one grand passion of a man’s life—it refines, softens, and makes beautiful the hardest natures.”

“What must it do to the poet?” she asked him, with a blush and a smile that bewildered him.

“It fills his heart so entirely that it overflows in song,” he answered. “Thus the world is made richer by a poet’s love. Now, Miss Gordon, have you forgotten your letter and your tears?”

It was like taking her from a fairyland of golden light, of sweetest warmth and fragrance, out into outer darkness and cold. She had forgotten all her troubles. The glamor of a sweet dream was over her. The light that never shown over land or sea was glowing on her face.

“Have you been telling me all these beautiful stories to make me forget?” she asked.

“Yes, I wanted to while you from sad and sorrowful thoughts; sadness and sorrow should never come near

you. You ought to know nothing but what is brightest and most beautiful. Now that we are better friends, Miss Gordon, will you tell me what those sorrowful thoughts were? Perhaps I can help you still more."

"I cannot tell you," she replied, hurriedly. "I have been so cruelly disappointed in one I love."

She did not notice that his handsome face had lost its color—that his lips trembled.

"And that some one," he interrupted, "was——"

"I cannot tell you," she repeated.

"Do not be cruel to me, Miss Gordon. Some one you love—was it a lover? Nay do not think me curious. As you are sweet, womanly, beautiful, be pitiful. Was it a lover?"

"No," she replied, with the simplicity of a child. "I never had a lover in my life."

He gave one great sigh of relief. Until that moment he did not know how great the torture of suspense had been. Ethel's face flushed deeply. She would fain have recalled the words when they were uttered, but it was too late. With the quickness that distinguished him, he saw instantly that she repented her freedom of speech.

"You have not told me," he said gently, "if you have quite forgotten the troubles."

"I have put them out of sight for a time," she said, smilingly, "and am not willing to look at them again just yet."

"I am afraid, Miss Gordon, you will think me presumptuous if I ask a great favor of you."

"I do not think I shall have any unfavorable thoughts of you," returned Ethel, "even if you ask me a favor."

"You like sitting here," he pursued. "I have watched you morning after morning coming here with your book, and have longed to join you. Will you permit me to do so occasionally?"

She looked up at him with the questioning glance of a child.

“I do not know. I should like to talk to you very much. Yes, I do not see why you should not come here when you like ; the grounds are open to every one.”

“But it would be you I should come to see—only you. I do not make any false pretense. It is not because I think this spot more beautiful than any other, or because I like it better—it is that I may see you, speak to you, sun myself in your bright presence. Now do you say ‘yes?’”

Her face became grave, the golden light deepened in her eyes.

“Miss Gordon do not refuse me. What your presence is to me I dare not say. Do not refuse me the greatest favor I have ever asked.”

The pleading of his voice, the wistful expression on his face touched her.

“If I see you here to-morrow morning,” he repeated, “may I come?”

There was just a lingering idea in her mind that it would not be quite right—Miss Digby would not like it. That last reflection decided her.

“Yes,” she replied, “if it pleases you, you may come.”

And he said to himself that he had made wonderful progress that bright, sunny morning ; and those who knew how proud, how reserved Ethel Gordon was would have agreed with him.



## CHAPTER XII.

THE love-story enacted at St. Ina's Bay was a romantic one. Whatever might be the secrets and follies of Laurie Nugent's life, he was most certainly thoroughly in earnest now; whatever flirtations he might have indulged in, this was the one great master-passion of his life. It had taken complete possession of him. He would have given his life for the beautiful brown-haired girl whose smiles were like glimpses of paradise to him. He would have given his life for her—yet he did not spare her, he had no pity for her, no remorse. His whole soul, every thought, every energy of his mind, was bent upon winning her. He seemed to have concentrated his very existence on that desire. But, knowing what he knew, why did he not spare her? Because his love was essentially selfish. He was capable of committing any crime for the sake of winning the girl he loved—he would have hesitated at nothing; but he was not capable of sparing her, of saving her from himself, of giving her up and leaving her. His love was utterly selfish.

He was frightened at himself, at the vehemence of his own passion, at its ascendancy over him. There were times when he almost loathed himself because a woman's smile could make his sun, or her frown his shade. There were times when he wondered if it were possible that he could be the same cynical, careless man who had laughed at love, and thought of it only as a pastime.

The day had no brightness for Laurie Nugent until he had seen Ethel; he fell asleep with her name on his lips, he dreamed of her at night—fair, gracious, sweet, and win-

some, yet so proud and reserved ; he woke thinking of her, longing for the hour in which he should see her, thinking of a thousand pretty things that he would say to her: The world was wide, the world was large, but in it all he saw only Ethel Gordon—proud, beautiful, bewitching Ethel. He caught himself repeating her name as the words of a song. It was as though he had gathered every force of his mind and soul together, and had centered them on her. Love with such a man, in such force, was rather a passion than an affection. He had sworn to himself that he would win her, that the sweet face should shine upon him and no other, that her lips should speak to him, and to no other man, of love.

Yet with it all he was prudent. He seldom spoke to Ethel in the presence of Lady Stafton—or Helen Digby ; he knew that it would hardly be safe to do so—that, if they perceived any attention on his part, they would, after the fashion of chaperons, begin to make inquiries as to his position and his fortune—such inquiries as would not suit him. So, with skill and adroitness worthy of a better cause, he continued to keep the elder ladies quite in ignorance of his friendship with Ethel.

When Miss Gordon was with them, he passed with a bow ; if he spoke to them, he contented himself by looking at her. When his heart beat, and his pulse throbbed with impatience, he comforted himself by saying that very soon she would be his, free from all restraints, from all surveillance. Yet, with all his prudence and caution, he had some narrow escapes.

One morning Helen Digby was restless, and even before the early dawn found herself unable to sleep ; she had dreams that frightened her, uneasy dreams of Ethel Gordon ; and she rose, thinking the morning air would refresh her and drive the disagreeable phantoms away. She went out on the lawn, and there saw Ethel talking to Laurie

Nugent; Ethel held in her hand some wild roses round which was entwined a spray of blue convolvulus. Miss Digby went up to her; she bowed coldly to Mr. Nugent, and laid one hand warningly on the girl's shoulder.

"Ethel," she said, "I did not know that you were up and out."

"Did you not?" was the careless rejoinder. "I am out early every morning."

"I thought myself very fortunate in meeting Miss Gordon," said Laurie Nugent, with a coldly polite bow; "it is not often that ladies believe the morning air to be beneficial."

He passed on, as though he had only just stopped to exchange a morning greeting with Ethel, and then Helen Digby turned gravely to the young girl

"My dearest Ethel," she said, "I do not like to seem officious, but your father trusted you entirely to me—so entirely, that I feel bound to see that you form no new friendships unless they are such as he would sanction."

"My father never interfered with me in that way himself," interrupted Ethel, quickly.

"Perhaps not, my dear; but then the circumstances were different. You had none but old friends around you, you were not among strangers, and your father, of course, could do as he liked."

"Equally, of course, can I," said Ethel, proudly. "Will you explain, Miss Digby, what you mean, and to what you are alluding?"

"Certainly I will, Ethel—plain speaking suits us both best. I saw you talking to Mr. Nugent; now, I merely say, my dear child, be cautious."

"Cautious of what? Mr. Nugent is an acquaintance of yours, a friend of your friends, I have heard you say."

"I grant it; a woman of my age, Ethel, may form acquaintances that a young girl had better not form. I say

nothing about Mr. Nugent—nothing against him, for I know nothing ; but I think you had better avoid him.”

“ You will pardon me if I ask why,” said Ethel ; and Miss Digby saw the gleam of defiance on her beautiful face.

“ In the first place, we know nothing of him, except that he is a friend of Lady Delamaine’s ; in the second, I tell you frankly, I do not like his face.”

“ Why do you not like it ? ” asked Ethel.

“ I cannot tell. It looks to me like a false face. It is not the face of a good man. There is cunning in the sharp eyes, and cruelty on the thin lips.”

“ You are prejudiced,” said Ethel, coldly. “ I have never heard of any sensible person disliking a man for the color of his eyes or the shape of his lips.”

“ Ethel, you will not understand me. It is not that. I say the expression of the face is bad—and I am sure it is not the face of a good man. Mind, I know nothing against Mr. Nugent ; but Nature never made a mistake in her handwriting, and she has written ‘ Beware ’ on his face.”

Ethel looked up at her, and the defiance deepened on her face.

“ Before you fatigue yourself by arguing any further, Miss Digby, will you tell me in what way Mr. Nugent concerns me ? ”

There was such scornful pride in the beautiful eyes that Helen Digby hastened to explain herself more fully.

“ I do not suspect that there is anything clandestine between you, my dearest Ethel—I have never thought of such a thing. I only wish to warn you. You are very young, Mr. Nugent is very handsome—a perfect man of the world—and I think it best to warn you.”

“ You must be more explicit still, Miss Digby.”

Helen Digby sighed. Her charge was terribly perverse.

“ I wish to warn you very distinctly and clearly against Mr. Nugent, Ethel. You are very lovely, my dear, and, naturally enough, he must admire you. He may pay you compliments, and flatter you ; do not believe him, do not trust him, do not put faith in anything he may say.”

“ You are supposing, Miss Digby, that I am not old enough to take care of myself.”

“ No, Ethel, I am only supposing that you are inexperienced. I should not like Sir Leonard to think that I had not taken good care of you.”

“ And I should like to show that I was able to take better care of myself than you could of me,” retorted Ethel ; and with those words, proudly spoken, she walked away, leaving Helen Digby to her own reflections.

That was the turning of the scale ; from that day the balance weighed in Laurie Nugent’s favor. That Miss Digby disliked him and had warned her against him was quite sufficient to make Ethel Gordon like him and incline in his favor. Helen Digby could not have done anything more fatal than express distrust of him. If Ethel could have acted as she liked, she would have talked to him more than before, and it always would have been in the presence of Miss Digby ; but Laurie Nugent was wiser. He saw by Helen’s face that she had not been quite pleased at seeing Ethel with him on the lawn.

“ Discretion is the better part of valor,” he said to himself. “ If Miss Digby should suspect what I have sworn, she will take Ethel where I cannot follow, and then I must lose her ; but, if I use a little self-control, she will not even suspect.”

So for the next few days, although it cost him more than he would have cared to acknowledge, he did not once approach Ethel—he did not even seek an opportunity of addressing her chaperon.

“ She shall not think me eager ; she shall find me per-

fectly indifferent," he said ; and Ethel was surprised to find how much she missed him.

Helen Digby, like the noble, simple, unsuspecting woman she was, laughed at herself for her suspicion. It had been only a passing thought, an idea that came from seeing them together, which she laughed at now. Laurie Nugent appeared to be sublimely indifferent to Ethel, and she, proud, cold, and haughty, would never care for any one. Helen Digby was quite at her ease, and in a few days had forgotten the circumstance, or, if she remembered it, it was only with a smile

## CHAPTER XIII.

"THE time has seemed so long to me since we spoke," said Laurie Nugent to Miss Gordon, several days after the lawn incident, "that I wonder how I have lived through it,"

"I do not see why you should not have spoken to me as usual," observed Ethel.

He gave one quick, shrewd glance at her—the beautiful face was quite calm and serene.

"I thought Miss Digby seemed displeased on Tuesday morning when she saw you speaking to me on the lawn, and, as I would not for worlds subject you to her displeasure, I thought it better not to address you."

He knew that the arrow had gone home when she drew her slender figure to its full height.

"Miss Digby's pleasure or displeasure affects me but very little," she said. And then Laurie Nugent knew that he held the key to the whole situation. The girl disliked her guardian, and would do anything to vex her.

"That was Tuesday," he said, "and this is Sunday. How I have lived through the week I cannot tell; it has seemed to me a century long."

It was Sunday evening, and the chiming of the Sabbath bells mingled with the music of the waves—a calm, beautiful evening, when all Nature seemed to know that Heaven's calm rested upon it. The sweet chime of the bells sounded from the distant church spire.

Laurie Nugent's diplomacy was strikingly successful that bright Sunday evening. From some of the satellites who were in his pay he had heard that Miss Gordon was

not going to church, and that Miss Digby and Lady Stafton were.

"They will never leave her here alone," he thought, "if they know I am not going."

So half an hour before church-time he framed an excuse to speak to Miss Digby, and then casually mentioned that he intended going through the woods to Skilton Old Church, as it was called.

Miss Digby and Lady Stafton set out, leaving Ethel alone. Lady Stafton had said something about the propriety of so leaving her, but Miss Digby, believing that no one was in the hotel but the manager, the servants, and a few lady guests, declined to interfere.

"It is hard enough to exercise any authority over her when the object is an important one," she said. "I must not try her too far by interfering without cause."

So the elder ladies went to church, and Ethel went to her favorite spot to hear the chiming of the bells. She looked up in surprise when Laurie Nugent appeared suddenly by her side.

"I thought you were going to church," she said.

Again he gave her one quick glance; the beautiful face was quite serene; there was no suspicion of his strategy.

"I did intend going," he replied; "but I changed my mind."

"I thought that was only a lady's privilege," rejoined Ethel, with a smile so bright and beautiful that he took courage and flung himself on the rich, thick clover at her feet.

"How sweet and sad those bells are!" he said, suddenly. "How calm and still the evening is! Have the birds a Sunday of their own, I wonder? Near to my window there is a great elm-tree, and there has been such a solemn cawing of the rooks."



“When I was a child,” observed Ethel, “I always thought the sunshine was of a different color on Sundays—it seemed to have a more golden, mellow light.”

When she was a child! As though she were anything else then! He looked up into the beautiful girlish face; it was so kind and sweet that he took courage and told her how cruelly long that week had seemed to him, in which he had hardly seen her.

And then—they seemed such old friends—she told him her simple story—how she had for so long been a petted, spoiled, beloved darling, the pride of her father’s life; how she had ruled with easy fantastic sway the entire household, and how dearly she had loved that sway; how her love and her affection seemed to fill her father’s life; and how suddenly this happy state of things had ended—how her father, having begun to find her full of faults, had determined to marry again, and had left her to learn the difficult lesson of obedience from her future mother-in-law.

“It seems very hard,” he said; “I do sympathize with you. One can never throw off the habit of a lifetime.”

So, gradually, by kind, gentle words, and delicately veiled expressions of dislike to Helen Digby, he led her on until he knew the simple story of her life by heart. He understood that Sir Leonard had repented when too late of the indulgence with which he had treated his daughter; he understood that the second marriage was more for her sake than his own, to provide her with a wise, sensible, womanly guide.

“I suppose,” he said, “that in all your life until now you have never been opposed or contradicted—you have done just as you would?”

She looked up at him brightly. “Papa liked my rule,” she said, “and I made every one happy.”

It pleased her to hear kind words from him. The scene was picturesque, the hour pleasant, the sound of

those murmured words delightful; and on this evening Laurie Nugent said more than he had ever said before. He told her how he had missed her; and there was such a ring of true passion in his words that proud Ethel was subdued as she listened.

"You think, because I have known you so short a time, I must be exaggerating. Ah, no—the brightness of day, the brightness of dawn comes with your presence. The flowers around us here are fair, but none are so fair as you; the gleam of the sun is bright, but it is not so bright as you; the sound of your voice is sweeter than the chiming of those Sabbath bells, or the music of the birds. When I look at you, all my life seems complete; the fairest dreams I have ever had are realized. I could worship you as men of old worshipped goddesses."

She smiled as she listened. He would have been better pleased if her dark, proud eyes had drooped, and her face had flushed. She smiled serenely, as she would have smiled at the words of a pleasant poem or the notes of a beautiful song. Still, she was not angry—and that was one point gained. If she would only listen to his pleadings—to all the love stories that he knew so well how to tell—he felt sure that he should win her in time.

"You can imagine how those who have lived for months in darkness long for the blessed light of the sun," he said. "So have I longed to see you."

She laughed a low sweet musical laugh.

"What am I to you," she said, "that you should wish to see me?"

He looked up into her face with a glance that stirred the depths of her heart.

"What are you to me!" he echoed. "Miss Gordon, all words fail me when I try to answer that question. What is the light of day to an imprisoned man? What is the sun to the world—the dew to the flowers—sweet

dropping rain to thirsty plants? What is grateful shade to a sun-scorched traveller—the sight of land to a storm-tossed sailor? What are you to me! If from sunrise to sunset I sat and spoke to you of nothing else, I could not tell you what you are to me.”

She glanced at him with the most natural and charming surprise in her dark eyes, the lovely dimpled lips were smiling; there was no confusion, no embarrassment in her manner, and, looking at her, Laurie Nugent wondered if she loved him—if ever he should win her—or if he should have to leave her at last.

“I have not displeased you, I trust,” he said, looking at the beautiful, downcast face. “You asked me the question so suddenly I was taken by surprise. If all the poetry in the world were compressed into a single song, it could not describe my affection for you—if all the love that has ever been felt by mortal man could be placed in one heart, it would still fall far short of the love I feel for you.”

She glanced at him quietly.

“You love me, then?” she queried, in a voice that breathed sweetest music.

“I love you!” he repeated—and the sound of his words startled him even more than it did Ethel Gordon.

They sat for some minutes in silence, while the chiming of the bells floated around them.

“I love you!” repeated Laurie Nugent. “I have summoned courage at last to say so. I loved you the first moment that I saw you, and I shall love you until I die. I know it is presumption. You are far above me as the blue sky or the golden sun; but I love you, and by the ladder of love I hope to climb to your side.”

He caught her white hands in a passionate grasp, so tightly as almost to cause her to cry aloud.

“What the men of old did to win the women they loved I would do, Ethel. I would serve for you twice

seven years, content if I might win you at last ; I would love you all my life, and be content to win one word, one smile, in return, as I lay dying ; I would go out and fight for you as did the heroes of old ; I would live for you, I would die for you ; for I love you Ethel, as no man has ever loved a woman before."

His voice died away in passionate murmur, and he buried his face in the silken, shining folds of her dress. She sat silent and motionless, for his words had fallen upon her with a blank surprise—she had not expected them.

"Ethel," he continued, "I have nothing to offer you that is worthy of you. What would be worthy? If I had all the world's wealth, and could lay it at your feet, it would be unworthy of you. If I were an emperor, and could raise you to the throne by my side, and could give you the crown from my brow, it would still be unworthy of you. I can give you nothing but the deep passionate love of my heart, my faith, my truth, my life."

He paused again, with the last word trembling on his lips. Her proud, frank eyes were shining down upon him, but there was no confusion in her face, no hesitation in her manner.

"Why do you love me so much?" she asked, with the simple wonder of a child. "I do not understand it."

"I cannot tell you, Ethel. Why do I love you? I cannot help it. I loved you before I knew your name, or had heard you speak. My heart went from me in the first glimpse I had of your beautiful face. Ask the birds why they sing, the flowers why they bloom, the sun why it shines. It would be easier for those to answer than for me to say why I love you. I cannot help it. It is my destiny, and no fairer one was ever given to man."

He raised his handsome head, and looked up into the calm proud, severe face.

"I am almost frightened at my own presumption," he

continued ; " it is as if a slave had dared to raise his eyes to the fairest, the proudest the brightest of queens. Ethel, say you are not angry with me."

" I am not angry," she replied.

" You will think I grow courageous with kindness. Say even more than that—what will you give me in return for my great love ?"

" I do not know," she answered ; and there was a grace so childlike, so innocent, so pure in her looks and words that once more the impulse was strong upon him to save her from himself. Only for one moment did it last, and then the selfish, passionate love rose in his heart, and he was kneeling at her feet.

" Ethel, I pray you give me something in return for my love—give me liking that will in time become love. Bid me do something that I can prove how dearly I love you. Do not send me from you to despair and death. I am a strong and a proud man ; my pride and strength, with my love and my life, are lying at your feet—stoop and raise them, Ethel."

He could not have spoken more effectively ; one of Ethel's weakest points was this love of power to which he now appealed. It was something to find that this strong, handsome, powerful man laid his life in her hands—knelt at her feet, praying for one kind word from her. It flattered her ; she had fancied herself so neglected, she had been deposed from her natural sovereignty, and it was pleasant to find that in one man's heart she reigned a most triumphant queen.

It was not love that caused her to leave her white hands in his passionate grasp—it was not love that caused her to droop her beautiful face over him—it was not love that shone in her eyes and trembled on her lips. It was only gratified vanity—gratified love of power.

“Ethel, say you will love me,” he said. “Say you will make me some little turn for my deep love.”

“I will,” she responded; “at least I will try.”

Once again he buried his face in the shining, silken folds, and she saw his strong frame trembling. Something like a long drawn sigh escaped from his lips,

“I was afraid,” he said, in a low voice. “I was sorely frightened Ethel; for I felt myself quite unworthy of you.”

Then he sat by her side and talked to her until the girl fancied that she was transported to some other sphere. It was pleasant to hear how beautiful she was, how completely she had conquered him, how strong were the chains that bound him to her, how deeply and dearly and truly he loved her. It was so pleasant that she abandoned herself to the charm, and Laurie Nugent, with a wild, exultant triumph, said to himself that he had won her—that she was his own.

The golden light of the evening sun faded into the purple gloaming, the vesper song of the birds gradually ceased, but still they sat on.

At length Laurie Nugent rose.

“It is growing late,” he said. “Ethel, my darling—I may call you darling now, and there is no sweeter word—I hardly like to propose it, but do you not think it would be better not to say anything at present to Miss Digby?”

She raised her head proudly, with that haughty glance he knew so well.

“Do you suppose that I should ever say anything to Miss Digby? It is no business of hers—it concerns papa. When I think it needful I shall write to him.”

“Miss Digby would take the keenest pleasure in parting us,” observed Mr. Nugent—“I am quite sure of that; and, O, Ethel! let me have a few days of happiness, a few days of such unutterable bliss as rarely falls to man’s lot! You will not even tell your father yet?”

“Not unless you wish me to do so,” she replied.

“He would be sure to write and place the whole matter in Miss Digby’s hands ; and then she would triumph. Keep your own sweet counsel, Ethel.”

“Miss Digby shall never triumph over me,” she said, proudly.

“And, Ethel, now that you have accepted me for your knight, you will consent sometimes to see me—you will let me join you in your evening rambles—you will be kind to me for the sake of the great and mighty love I bear you?”

She promised, and bending his handsome head he kissed the white, soft hands—he looked at the beautiful face, but dared not touch it with his lips—and then, slowly and reluctantly, he went away through the silent woods.

Helen Digby wondered that night at Ethel ; the girl looked so beautiful, with a softened light on her face, and a dreamy expression in her eyes. Her words were unusually gentle, her manner had more than its ordinary charm. Helen was delighted, and cherished the vain hope that Ethel was beginning to like her at last. When the ladies had discussed the sermon, the congregation, and the long, pleasant walk home, Lady Stafton said,—

“I did not see Mr. Nugent. He went to the old church, I suppose.”

“I am almost glad we did not see him,” remarked Miss Digby. “I really cannot tell why, but I am beginning to have a strange mistrust of him. I do not like Mr. Nugent.”

A moment afterward, looking at Ethel, she saw the fair young face crimson, and Helen sighed as she wondered at it.

“You are prejudiced, Helen,” said Lady Stafton, laughing. “There is nothing particular in Mr. Nugent to admire, nor do I see anything to dislike.”

Then Ethel rose and said good-night. Helen Digby looked pleased.

“Ethel is beginning to like me, and to feel more at home with me,” she said. “How happy I shall be when she cares for me! She is a grand, noble, generous girl, despite her pride and her love of power. I cannot help longing for her affection.”

Lady Stafton laughed again, thinking her friend sentimental, while Ethel went to her room to dream once more of the scene in the woods.

Laurie Nugent was triumphant; he had barely hoped for so great a success. Ethel was so beautiful, so haughty, her smiles, though so sweet, were so rare, that he had hardly dared to hope that Ethel would listen to him. On that calm Sabbath evening he walked through the silent woods, feeling, with his poetical, beauty-loving nature, the charm of the scene around him. Yet no beauty, no charm tempted him to spare Ethel. He thought of her proud, fair young beauty—of her high spirit, her noble nature; he wondered how she would endure the life that lay before her; he wondered whether in the time to come she would dislike him, hate him, loathe him. He wondered over all these things, yet the idea of sparing her, of saving her, was beyond him—he was not capable of the sacrifice.

“I must hasten matters now,” he said, as he stopped to gather a spray of wild clematis. “I cannot hide from myself that I increase the chances of danger by lingering here. Ah, me! if life could be passed among love and flowers, I, for one, should be quite content.”



## CHAPTER XIV.

DID she love him, or did she not? That was a question Laurie Nugent often asked himself during the next few days. He had deemed himself well versed in the ways of woman; he thought, with a half contemptuous smile, of how easily they were understood, of how easily they were managed; he wondered at the nonsense men wrote and uttered about the impossibility of understanding the fairer half of creation. But this young girl puzzled him. She had met him and talked with him; she had even answered some of the passionate love-letters he had written to her; but her proud, serene calm fairly puzzled him.

Her face never changed its color for him, her eyes never drooped beneath his, her hands never trembled when he held them in a warm, loving clasp; she had none of the pretty shyness that he thought belonged naturally to young girls in love; she did not seem to study his looks and words as others had done; she was kind, gracious, gentle, but she never lost her proud serenity, her dignified calm. He thought much of it, but he could not tell whether she loved him.

Nor had Ethel answered a like question satisfactorily to herself. It was very pleasant to be wooed in so chivalrous a fashion—to see a tall, strong, handsome man submissive as a child—to know that he obeyed her slightest wish that he trembled at her frown, that her least word could raise him to heaven, or fling him into the depths of despair. Ethel Gordon's love of power was gratified by her ascendancy over Laurie Nugent. It was flattering to see the color change on his handsome face, the strong hands trem-

ble at her approach. But, if all she had read of love in poesy was true, she did not love him. She believed she did. The break in the calm monotony of her life had been more than pleasant; the stir of gratified vanity, the love of rule, the desire of doing something that Miss Digby did not approve, the wish to oppose her—the delightful consciousness of disobeying her—all these things Ethel Gordon mistook for love.

And so mistaking, she was bitterly disappointed. She had now reached the shores of that golden land that in the distance had so completely charmed her. She found them bleak and barren; the bright fairyland was but a dry waste. She sighed deeply as she said to herself that she was in love, and that love after all was not what she had imagined. She recalled the glowing verses of the poets who had written of it, the glorious melodies that told of it, the books written in eloquent words with love for a theme—and that was all.

It did not occur to her that she had mistaken gratified vanity for love; she was not even conscious how far the desire to oppose and thwart Miss Digby influenced her; and she was disappointed that love was not more entrancing after all. She had read somewhere that it changed the very aspect of the world for those who opened their hearts to it, that the sunshine became more golden, that the flowers grew more fair. She had not found it so. It was very pleasant to be so tenderly cared for, so assiduously worshipped—to know that one man's thoughts were all for her, that his life was centered in her—to know that her very action was of the highest importance to him. But there it all ended; she could not understand what the poets had meant by rapture and delight. She owned to herself that, now this great, grand dower of womanhood had been given to her, she did not think so very much of it. The part that she enjoyed the most and found the

greatest pleasure in was in, remembering how completely she had ignored Helen Digby.

“What will papa think of me when he learns that under her auspices, under her charge and control, under her guidance, I have met a lover, settled my whole life, and she knows nothing of it? What will papa say to that? What will he think of her boasted prudence, her power of guidance?”

It was neither a kind nor a generous view to take of matters—it was unlike Ethel Gordon—but her dislike of Miss Digby had blinded her, and she went slowly on the road that led to her doom.

One beautiful morning Laurie Nugent did not feel inclined to join the other guests at breakfast. He asked for a cup of coffee and the morning papers to be taken out into one of the pretty little arbors that were dotted over the grounds. He had been dreaming of Ethel all night, thinking of her ever since the morning sun had begun to shine, and he felt unable and unwilling to speak to others until he had looked upon her. He knew that she would be out soon. On those warm, beautiful days the visitors at the hotel cared little for being indoors. He opened the paper—there was but little news. Once or twice he laid it down, for between him and the printed page the face of Ethel Gordon seemed to float.

“How she has bewitched me!” he said to himself.

He laid the paper aside, and then took it up again. Suddenly the smile died from his lips, and a livid pallor not pleasant to behold came over his face. There was a small paragraph of five or six lines which seemed to fascinate him. He read and re-read it.

“It cannot be true,” he said to himself. “It is a ruse to satisfy people. Of course the police must say something or the public would lose all faith in them. It cannot be true. They know nothing about it.”

He laid the paper down again, but the hand that raised the cup to his lips trembled so that he could hardly hold it.

“Good Heavens, if it should be true!” he cried. “And I am wasting time here. I ought to leave this very day, this very hour, but—I cannot—I would just as soon die as leave my love. I must take her with me.

There was no more quiet reading for him that morning. It seemed to him that he hardly had time to think. The ladies came out, and Miss Digby sent to him for the *Times*. It was strange how he hesitated about giving it to her. His face flushed, and then grew pale.

“I cannot tear it out,” he said. “They might think it strange. How foolish I am! What can they know of it?”

Yet, when after a time he saw the paper open in Ethel's hand, he rose from his seat with a suppressed cry; but with an effort he again controlled himself, and then walked away from the spot. Lady Stafton, meeting him some time afterward, said,—

“You do not look well this morning, Mr. Nugent.”

He murmured a few words. She saw how his lips trembled, and she passed on, while Laurie Nugent sought the silent depths of the wood, there to think at his ease. He seated himself on the grass.

“In the first place,” he mused, “is it true? I do not believe it. If there be only the least foundation for such a rumor, I ought to fly at once, without an hour's delay. Can I go? Can I leave the girl I love better than my life? A thousand times—no! I cannot leave her. If I go she must go with me. And how can that be accomplished?”

The old doubt returned to him—did she really love him, or was it gratified vanity and love of rule? Never mind—it mattered little to him. He loved her, and every desire of his heart was centered in her. He had sworn to win

her, and he would keep his vow. She would love him in time.

"I must go, and I must take her with me," he repeated. For some time he sat absorbed in thought, his face grave and anxious. Suddenly a light came over it, and Laurie Nugent sprang from his seat with a cry.

"I have found it—I can manage it! If I make good use of Miss Digby, I may win the day."

So careless, so volatile, so *debonnair* was he that as he sat an idle strain of song came from his lips. He had solved the problem—he saw his way clear to persuade Ethel to go away with him. What now cared he?

"I must make Miss Digby more useful than ever she has been in her life," he said. "She must be the decoy. I wonder if my love will consent?"

Yet during the remainder of that day Laurie Nugent was strangely nervous. If any one entered the hotel suddenly, he would start and grow pale. He asked more than once if there were any new arrivals, and seemed greatly relieved when he was told "No." "Nor will there be," said the manager, "at this time of the year. St. Ina's is quite out of the beaten track."

A look of wonderful relief came over Mr. Nugent's face.

"You really consider it quite out of the beaten track?" he questioned.

"It is the least frequented spot in England," was the reply, "although I think it one of the prettiest." Then the manager left his guest to his own meditations.

"I must see Ethel to-night," he said; "and then, if she will consent, to-morrow I will go over to Holmleigh—that is the nearest place. I will make all arrangements there. This is Tuesday—if she consents at all, she will agree for Thursday."

He wrote on a slip of paper—"I want to see you so particularly, Ethel, my dear love, that I am obliged to ask

you to come out for a few minutes this evening. Do not be later than nine, and come to the lime-grove—I shall be waiting for you there. Do not refuse, sweet, for all my future life depends upon the ‘Yes,’ or ‘No,’ that you will say to me to-night.”

He contrived to place that in her hand, and when she smiled, he knew that she had consented. She would rather have died than smiled, had she known what would come of that evening’s meeting.

## CHAPTER XV.

THE stars were gleaming in the depths of a dark blue sky, the night wind was sweet with the breath of odorous blossoms, the dew thick upon the grass and the flowers—a great calm and silence seemed to lie like a blessing over the earth; the lime-trees were faintly stirred by the night wind, the leaves rustled and sighed.

Ethel walked quickly and quietly down to the lime-grove. She had found some little difficulty in leaving the house unobserved, but she had accomplished it; and, when Helen Digby believed her safe in her room, she was walking with rapid steps to meet Laurie Nugent.

She knew perfectly well that she was not doing right—in the long, sad after-years she never tried to excuse herself—but there was comfort to her in the thought that she was deliberately disobeying Helen Digby.

“If my father could see me now,” she thought to herself, “he would say it would have been better to leave me alone. If he had trusted me, I would not have done this.”

Bitter, cruel, unjust thoughts against her father’s chosen wife came over her as she walked in the silence of the sweet summer night to keep her appointment. There was no seat under the fragrant limes, and Laurie Nugent, as soon as he saw Ethel, hastened forward, and took both her hands in his.

“My darling,” he said, “how good of you to come! I knew that I was asking the greatest possible favor. I hardly dared to hope that you would grant it.”

There was an answering light of joy on her face. She smiled gently as one who was simply pleased.

"You wanted me particularly ; so I could not refuse to come But I must not stay. Tell me quickly what it is—**Laurie.**"

She hesitated before uttering the name ; but he had prayed so hard that she would use it that she made the effort. He kissed her white hands as he thanked her, and then she raised her eyes to his face.

"What is it, Laurie ? I must not stay."

To her great surprise she saw tears shining in his eyes, and the light of the stars showed that his face was pale and sorrowful.

"I have so much to say to you, my darling, that I hardly know how to begin. Ethel, you have read of women who have held the hearts of men in the hollow of their small white hands—in like manner do you hold mine. You have read of women who have held men's lives in their power—so, dearest, do you hold mine. On your, 'Yes' or 'No' to-night depends my whole future—my life, my death, my sorrow, my joy, my well or evil doing, all depend on what you shall say to me to-night."

She looked anxiously at him—the starlight, the night wind, the solemn silence, the holy calm, all tended to soften her heart. She felt more kindly disposed to him than she had ever felt before—such absolute sovereignty over a tall, strong man was delightful. She let her white hand linger in his clasp, and said, gently,—

"Tell me what you mean, Laurie."

He was silent for a few minutes, and she guessed rather than knew that some great struggle was going on in his mind. Suddenly he did what he had never dared to do before—he clasped her in his arms and kissed her beautiful face.

"My darling," he said, gently, "if I could but take you away—if we could only leave this cold, cruel world behind us—if we could go where there are no troubles, no sorrows,



where the sun is always bright, and the world always fair!"

She shrank from him, and the idea struck her that, although she was in love with him, she would not care about going away with him. Then Laurie recovered himself, and Ethel reproached herself that she was not kinder to him.

"My darling Ethel," he said, "I am going to put your love to the test. You are a generous, noble girl; you have heroism and courage for anything that you care to do. I want you to display that heroism for me. I want to put your love to the test. Will you bear it, do you think?"

"Yes," she replied, proudly; "any test that you can offer I can bear."

"That is spoken like yourself; you are braver than any other woman, Ethel, just as you are more beautiful. How many girls in your place would have meekly yielded to Miss Digby—would have submitted to her in everything! But you have held your own against her. What I have to ask you to-night would dismay and frighten a woman of Miss Digby's class."

He had studied Ethel so well, he knew how to practice on every weakness—he could play upon her feelings, her faults, her virtues, as a clever musician upon a harp. He knew that she would do and dare more from a spirit of opposition to Miss Digby than from love for himself.

"Ethel," he continued, "give me a patient hearing. I find that I am obliged to leave here suddenly—I ought to go to-morrow—and, oh, my love, it breaks my heart to leave you. I cannot go alone."

She looked up at him with wondering eyes.

"You must go alone, Laurie. I cannot accompany you."

"You could, my darling, if you would be only a little braver than other women are—a little more courageous.

Ethel, let me make you my wife quite secretly, and then go away with me."

"I cannot," she replied "papa would never forgive me."

"Yes, he would. Hundreds of marriages take place in the same way. He would forgive you directly."

"But it would not be right. I could not do it; do not ask me, Laurie."

"It would be quite right, my darling. Where did you tell me your father was!"

"He is at Vienna," she said, gently. "But, Laurie, I can never consent."

The deadly despair that came over him at the thought of losing her frightened him.

"Ethel, listen to reason. Marry me, and I will take you to Austria; we will go to your father and ask him to forgive us." He had not the least intention of doing what he said, but he knew the idea would please her. "Such a step as that would have one effect," he said; "your father would never afterward marry Miss Digby."

Her whole heart changed as he said the words.

"He would never marry Miss Digby! Oh, Laurie, are you quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure," he replied. "Your father would ask himself of what use would it be to marry a woman who had not been able to keep his daughter under control? He could not believe in her prudence or discretion after that. He would not be angry with you, but he would be so angry with her that he would in all probability refuse to see or speak to her again."

"Do you think so?" cried Ethel.

"I am sure of it. Then there is another thing, Ethel. Your father's chief object in marrying is to secure a friend and adviser for you. If you were married, there would be no need for such a friend."

Her face grew brighter still.

“There would not, indeed,” she said.

“I am quite certain, Ethel,” he continued, “that if you consent to my wish your father will never marry at all.”

“If I thought so, I would say ‘Yes’ at once, Laurie.”

His heart beat with triumph, yet he felt almost ashamed of the manner in which that triumph was won.

“It would really be a grand jest, Ethel, to go to Vienna as my wife, and let your father see of what little use Miss Digby is after all. He would see then that she is not capable of taking care of you, but that you were and are quite capable of taking care of yourself. How surprised he would be to find that Miss Digby had failed!”

“You tempt me, Laurie,” she said gently. “You do not think, then, that my father would be very angry?”

“He would not be angry at all, darling—who could be angry with you?—but he would see how very much he had overrated Miss Digby.”

“It would be a great triumph,” she remarked; “but would it be right?”

“Right to keep your father’s love for yourself—right to expose the incapacity of the woman he has selected to be your adviser—right to make the man you have honored with your love happy? How can you ask me, Ethel? Most certainly it would be right. You told me,” he continued, “that Miss Digby had warned you against me. Imagine the triumph of going with me into her presence, and of saying to her, ‘Here is the man against whom you warned me; he is my husband now!’ Imagine her anger, her mortification. They would be immeasurable, Ethel.”

The idea took possession of Ethel. To obtain such glorious revenge upon her rival she would have committed any act short of dishonor or sin.

She hardly heard the half-whispered, pleading, passionate words, so completely had this idea taken possession

of her. She could not have devised sweeter triumph, more bitter revenge, as regarded the woman who had stepped between her and the bright pleasures of her life. She had been chosen for her prudence, her discretion, her womanly wisdom, her capability of guidance. If she could convince her father that Helen Digby had none of these qualities, he would surely abandon all idea of marrying her. He would own that he had been mistaken—the Gordons were proud even in their humility—and there would be an end of it.

Her beautiful face flushed, and a proud defiant light came into her eyes. He was thinking of nothing but love and winning her—she was thinking solely of revenge.

With the stars shining down upon her, and the night wind whispering around her, she gave herself up to this dream of revenge. Suppose that she yielded to Laurie—that on Thursday she met and married him—that they afterward went home and together sought Helen Digby's presence—what a triumph it would be! She pictured to herself the scene—how she would take Laurie's hand in her own and say, "Miss Digby, this is the gentleman you warned me against—he is my husband now. I married him this morning, and we are going to join my father in Austria. He will know how to appreciate your watchful care."

She smiled as she pictured the dismay on Helen Digby's face; the triumph would be complete and sweet—she could ask no greater. It was characteristic of her that she gave no thought to the future. This marriage, if she agreed to it, would restore her to her father's love—her lost position. She never once remembered that if she became Laurie Nugent's wife she must go away and live with him. She never once thought of the future—whether he would go to Fountayne or London; she only remembered that she could take no greater vengeance on Helen Digby than by

proving to Sir Leonard that he was quite mistaken in his estimate of her. That the vengeance might recoil on her own head did not occur to her. She never thought of the consequences of her marriage; she thought that Laurie Nugent loved her very dearly, and that all his happiness depended on her. If she could make him happy, regain her lost position, keep her father's love, and take revenge on Miss Digby all at one stroke, how thankful she ought to be! Then she roused herself to hear what he was saying.

"I have my faults, Ethel, but my love for you is greater than I can tell—it fills my whole heart and leaves room for nothing more. If you refuse me, Ethel, and I have to leave you, I shall become a desperate man—I shall care for nothing, shall go to ruin as fast as I can go; life will have no interest, no charm for me. If you will trust me, will grant my prayer and be my wife, I will make you the happiest woman in all the wide world."

He stopped suddenly, and by the light of the stars he saw her beautiful face raised to his.

"Is it right, Laurie? Will people blame me afterward, and say I have done an unwomanly action?"

There was something like remorse in his heart when he answered, with all appearance of frankness—"No. No one would ever blame her—people did things of that kind every day. If there was any wrong, any harm in it, he would not ask her to do it."

"No," she said, with the simple faith of a child, "I am quite sure you would not."

It had never occurred to her to ask him any questions about his position, his ability to keep a wife, his income, his source of revenue—she had never thought of it. She thought of two things only—her desire to prevent her father's marriage, and her desire to make Laurie Nugent happy.

Neither of these two motives would have been strong enough to influence her separately—the two combined conquered her. In after years she wondered at her own reckless want of thought, her carelessness, her utter disregard of all consequences. “I must have been blind,” she said, “when I consented—nay, I must have been mad!”

The time never came when she confessed that love of Laurie Nugent had influenced her—of all the motives stirring in her heart and helping her on to ruin, that was the feeblest. She believed that she loved him; yet afterward, when real love came to her—the royal dower of noble women—she knew that for Laurie Nugent she had felt nothing but a kindly, pleasant, almost indifferent affection, and that he had won her by dint of flattering homage and devotion which few women could have resisted.

She wondered, too, in the long, sad after-years, how she could have so far forgotten her own ideas of right and wrong—how she could have taken pleasure in revenge so unworthy of a Gordon—how she could have been so deaf to all the appeals of her better self, her nobler nature—how she could have rushed so blindly, so madly on her fate. If she had had the excuse of passionate love, it would have been better for her—it would have lessened her folly, it would have been some excuse for her rashness; but she was not influenced by love.

“Ethel,” said Laurie, “you are so silent that I begin to fear. Can you fancy how a drowning man would pray if in the midst of a fierce, raging sea he saw a spar to which he could cling? Yet no such man could plead for life as I plead for the one word—, ‘Yes.’ O, Ethel! I love you so dearly! Could you live for a thousand years, you would never know such love again. My darling, will you consent?”

Still she hesitated, but she was young, and the passion of his words was beginning to influence her. Her face

softened and grew tender, her voice became a sweet, musical murmur; she left her white, jewelled hand in her lover's clasp, and he wooed her with such earnest devotion his handsome face flushed with eagerness, his eyes and lips eloquent with love—he wooed her with such eloquent words, with such passion, such poetry, such romance, that it would have been hard for her to resist. Had it been in the broad light of noon, in the garish light of day, she would perhaps have hardened her heart against him, and have said "No;" but the hour of night had its own witchery, its own glamour—the air was so fragrant with rich perfume, that light of the stars so tender and so pure, the whisper of the western wind so sweet and low, the silence of the summer night so beautiful, that the place and its surroundings mastered her. She did not resist when he clasped his arm round her, and bending down, kissed the fair face, his heart beating as he thought that the proud young beauty would so soon be all his own.

"You are willing, Ethel?" he whispered; and she replied,—

"Yes, I am willing, Laurie."

"You have chosen wisely—and, believe me, my darling, you will never repent your choice. You can imagine what a life you would have had if your father had returned and married Miss Digby. There would have been no love to spare for you. She would have made herself complete mistress of your father's house, and you would have been compelled to submit to her as a little child. You would have found such a life intolerable. Now you will have freedom, liberty, brightness, all that you value most."

Yet even as he spoke he knew that he had bound her in heaviest chains.

"I ought to go in now," said Ethel. "Suppose that I should be missed?"

"Nay, no happier hour will come to us, Ethel, than

this. The grand shore of the golden land is shining before us. We may not be happier when we reach it than standing, as we do now, gazing upon it. Stay just a little longer. O, Ethel—my beautiful, proud Ethel—if I could linger here with you while life lasted !”

There was somewhat of pain, of regret, of remorse, of unhappiness in his voice which touched her generous heart more than all his love had done.

“Are you not happy now, Laurie?” she asked; and he thought her voice had never been so sweet.

“Happy, my darling? I am frightened at my own happiness. I find myself wishing that I were richer than a millionaire, so that I might surround you with everything most precious and bright. I find myself wishing that I had the goodness of a saint, that I might be more worthy of you. Happy? Ah, Ethel, I wonder if you will ever know the keen rapture of such joy as mine?”

As they walked beneath the fragrant limes, and he told her, in the most tender and eloquent words he could command, over and over again, the story of his love, she saw how mighty it was—how it filled his heart, filled his soul; and she was touched by the strength of such affection. She was nearer loving him in that hour than she had ever been, and for the time she almost forgot her desire for revenge.

The silence of the summer night deepened; one by one the lights in the windows of the hotel were extinguished, and Ethel suddenly remembered how late it was.

“I must go, Laurie,” she said.

He dared not ask her to remain. He must be prudent for a few hours longer, and then she would be his own—he could take her away over the wide seas, where there would be no more need for prudence or restraint. He had deceived her—for in his own mind he knew perfectly well that he had no idea of taking her to Vienna, or of



ever allowing her to see her father again—he best knew why. He knew, too, that the imaginary incident he had amused her with—the interview between Miss Digby and herself—would never take place. He meant to marry her on Thursday. They would be obliged to part for a few hours. While those few hours lasted he intended to bind her over to secrecy, and for the rest he trusted to his own ready wit. Let him once make sure of her—once marry her—and he would ask no more.

“Ethel, before you go, will you listen to my arrangements for you?”

She stopped—and he never forgot her as he saw her then, the starlight falling on her upraised face, showing every exquisite feature in the soft light, the dainty head held proudly up, the shining folds of her dress falling around her, and her white hands clasped. He could not quite understand the expression of her face; he read on it the simple faith of a child, mingled with the dawn of tenderness—no anxiety, no fear.

“To-morrow will be Wednesday, and I will devote the whole of it to making arrangements. You have heard of the pretty little town of Holmleigh—not far—not above two miles from St. Ina’s? It has an old church called St. Ann’s; and I thought, Ethel, my darling, we would be married there.”

She did not reply. The marriage itself did not interest her so much as the interview with Miss Digby which was to follow it.

“I will procure a special license, so that we shall have no difficulty, and I will, with your consent, my darling, arrange the time for half-past eight on Thursday morning. You can rise as early as you generally do; and it is no unusual thing for you to take an early morning ramble. Suppose you do so. Miss Digby will think you have gone out into the woods. I will meet you, and we can walk to

Holmleigh Church. We are not likely, in this quiet place, to encounter any one, or to be seen—and the church stands quite by itself, you know, at the foot of a hill just before you enter the town. We can return by separate roads.”

“And then?” she questioned, eagerly.

He knew well of what she was thinking.

“Then we can have the grand interview with Miss Digby,” he said—“and very amusing it will be. I can imagine so well what she will say, and how she will look. After that, my darling, we will lose no time—we will start at once for Austria.”

The untruth did not trouble him. He found her so easy to manage that he felt sure, when they came out of church, he would be able to invent some story or other that would satisfy her.

“Do you consent to these arrangements, Ethel?” he asked.

“Yes; I cannot object. You are quite sure it is right, Laurie?”

“I am certain it is,” he replied, with a ready confidence that cheered her; and then, bending over her, he wished her good-night.

She preferred to go back to the house alone. He stood and watched her, his heart thrilling with the thought that in a short time that fair young girl would be his wife.

It seemed strange that when he entered the hotel his first question was as to whether any strangers had arrived. “No.” was the reply; “St. Ina’s has never been more quiet.”

“I am safe,” he said to himself. “If there had been any truth in that report, they would have been here before this. Give me forty-eight hours more, and I shall be over the sea with my proud, beautiful Ethel.”

Little did Helen Digby dream of the conspiracy form-

ing against her. She was happier than she had been since her arrival at St. Ina's. She believed Ethel was beginning to like her ; there had been more of gentleness in her manner, and something which Helen could not define—a shadow of regret. Ethel herself slept well ; it was wonderful how blind she was to the enormity of the step she contemplated. Laurie Nugent was the last person she dreamed of ; her father, Helen Digby, even Lady Stafton, occupied her thoughts more often than he did. Laurie was to prevent her father's marriage—Laurie was to restore her to her own position at Fountayne—Laurie worshipped her more fondly and truly—so he said—than man ever worshipped woman before ; so she was grateful to him. He had been the first to give any romance to her girlish dreams ; it was from him that she had first learned how bewitching and charming she was ; he had ministered to her pride, her vanity, her love of power, and, therefore, she was grateful to him, and had consented to marry him with far greater heedlessness than she would have promised to walk out with him.

## CHAPTER XVI.

ETHEL GORDON smiled when Helen Digby bade her good-morning, and, contrary to her usual rule, kissed her.

"You are looking so well, this morning, Ethel," she said; "your face has all the bloom and freshness of a rose."

More than once that day Ethel wondered if anything would happen to prevent their marriage. She might have known the state of her heart from the fact that, whenever she thought of any obstacle arising, her regret was not to be able to enjoy her triumph over Miss Digby. She thought but little of any pain that might arise from losing Laurie Nugent.

But it was not in the decrees of fate that anything should happen to prevent the marriage of Sir Leonard's daughter.

Early on Wednesday morning Laurie Nugent went over to Holmleigh to make arrangements for the marriage. The story he told to the rector of St. Ann's—the Rev. Mr. Brian—was fully known only to himself. There was some pathetic history of an orphan girl living in some uncongenial, unhappy home, and he, on the point of starting for abroad, on a most sudden and unexpected journey, wished to marry her and take her with him. Mr. Brian thought himself doing a very meritorious deed when he consented to marry them.

Then Laurie Nugent made all other needful arrangements—instead of going to Austria, he intended to start at once for America. "Mr. and Mrs. Nugent" were to take their passage in one of the steamers belonging to the

great Inman line. He had thought over this plan for some time, and then decided that it was quite safe. He did not intend to give Ethel time to say anything to Miss Digby, nor did he intend any of them to see her again.

“She must share my lot henceforward,” he said, “and forget all about them.”

Then it struck him that much as Ethel had spoken to him of her home, he had never asked her where it was, nor had he made any inquiries as to her father’s rank in life.

“It shows how deeply and heartily I love the girl,” he thought to himself. “I have never stopped to ask one question about her affairs. If she had all the money in the world, I could love her no more than I do; if she has none, I love her just as much. The chances are that, if she were the greatest heiress in England, it would be impossible for me ever to claim what is hers. It is Ethel I want—Ethel with her grand dower of youthful beauty—and not money.”

He arranged in his own mind that when they were married he would return at once to the hotel, while Ethel lingered in the woods; he would send all his luggage away and with it, unnoticed, two large boxes of hers. They could meet together at the station and come away from St. Ina’s, he would defy fate. Ethel would want to have her own way—to throw down the gauntlet of defiance to Miss Digby; but he would invent some excuse for getting her to the station, and then, finding resistance useless, she would submit. Everything was arranged in his own mind, and to his own satisfaction, when he returned to the Queen’s Hotel.

Some gentleman who played very beautifully on the harp had been asked to give the ladies the pleasure of hearing him; the harp was brought out on to the lawn, and when

Laurie Nugent arrived there was quite a concert. He thought of the scene for years afterward—the sun shining so brightly on the lawn and gleaming in the fountains, the flowers all in bloom, the rustling foliage of the limes looking golden in the brilliant light, the soft, sweet music sounding above the song of the birds, and the murmur of the fountains. He saw Helen Digby seated by Lady Stafton's side, each listening intently to the music. He went over to them, and Helen looked up at him with a kindly smile.

“You have been away all day, have you not, Mr Nugent?”

Ethel was standing by her side, and Laurie stole a glance at her as he replied,—

“Yes, I have been away on very important business, and I am glad to say that I have met with perfect success.”

Their eyes met for a moment, and then hers drooped, and a burning blush spread over her lovely face.

“Success is always charming,” said Helen, little dreaming what Laurie Nugent's success implied.

“I have never found it so welcome as in the case of the business I have been about to-day,” he said, laughing.

He lingered with them, talking principally to Miss Digby, and glancing occasionally at the beautiful face drooping over the flowers. As for Ethel, she saw nothing, she heard nothing, plainly; it was one confusing whirl to her. The whisper of the wind, the rushing of the leaves, the rippling of the fountains, the music of the harp, all said but one thing to her—“I am to be married to-morrow.” She heard those words—“married to-morrow”—in every sound that fell upon her ears, until she began to wonder whether she was losing her reason or not.

It was one of the pleasantest and gayest evenings that had ever been spent at the Queen's Hotel; Ethel Gordon remembered it forever afterward. Years were to pass be-

fore beauty and music and perfume would have any charm for her again.

The last question that Laurie Nugent asked that night, was the one that came so often from his lips,—

“Have any strangers arrived?” And the answer was, as usual; “No.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE morning dawned bright and fair; the dew lay shining on the grass and flowers, the wood-pigeons were cooing, the plover crying among the corn, when Ethel Gordon quietly left the house on her fatal errand. The morning was not fresher or fairer than she; her face had the delicate, exquisite bloom of the wild rose, her eyes were bright as stars, with the golden light deepening in them. She looked round on the scene encircling her, she raised her eyes to the blue heavens, and thought to herself how fair all Nature was bathed in the morning light.

A great cluster of passion-flowers stood near the gate which led from the lawn to the coppice. The coppice led to the woods, and Laurie was waiting there for her, she knew full well.

She stopped to gather some of the sad, grand, mystical flowers—they were all wet with dew, which she flung from the leaves, looking into the flowers' depths and admiring the sweet symbols. Roses were growing there, too, and large white lilies, and long sprays of blue convolvulus; but she passed all these, and filled her hands with the passion-flowers.

"My wedding-day!" she thought to herself. "What would my father think if he knew this was my wedding-day?"

Some little shadow fell over the brightness of the morning when she remembered that to-day Helen Digby would meet her fate. Then at the end of the coppice she saw Laurie Nugent with an impatient, eager look on his handsome face. She had just time to note that he wore a bear



tiful white hyacinth, and then he caught sight of her and hastened to clasp her in his arms.

“My darling Ethel, how beautiful you look this morning! You shame the sun and the flowers. Oh Ethel, the sun may well shine so brightly—it is our wedding-day!” They walked on side by side, and the beauty of the scene deepened in the wood. The dew lay more thickly on the grass, the sunlight fell brokenly through the thick foliage, producing varying lights and shadows. The solitude deepened, too, and they seemed to be walking away from the rest of the world into a fairyland of their own.

Laurie turned to take her hands in his own.

“Shall we ever see anything so fair as this woodland scene, or be so happy again in this world?” he said. “Lay your hands in mine, Ethel, and let us talk. Smile your brightest, my darling—it is our wedding-day.”

She gave him one hand only. “I cannot spare the other,” she explained. “You forget my flowers.”

His attention had been so entirely absorbed in her beautiful face that he had never even looked at them; but now he bent forward, and she was startled by a low cry from his lips—by the sudden pallor of his face.

“Why, Ethel, “he cried, “these are passion-flowers! Who ever heard of a bride with a bouquet of passion-flowers? What an evil omen, my darling! I am not superstitious, but it has frightened me.”

“Nor am I superstitious,” she said, laughing.

“Why did you gather them?” he asked. “Passion-flowers on a wedding day! Why did you gather them, Ethel?”

“I do not know. They were shining with dew and close to my hand. I cannot give you any other reason than that.”

“You will throw them away, will you not, Ethel?”

She looked admiringly at them, “I think not,” she re-

plied. "That would be giving way to superstition. I come of a race that knows no fear, that never looks back, that abides by what is done. The motto of our house is, 'Gordon abides by what Gordon does.' I gathered these flowers thoughtlessly, I own, for my wedding bouquet, but I shall take them with me."

"It is an evil omen, Ethel."

"We will pay no heed to it. I have no faith in omens." But he gave her no answering smile.

"Throw them away, Ethel, I implore you."

The idea seemed to her both weak and cowardly.

"They must go with me" she returned. "What influence can it have on my future life that I was married with passion-flowers in my hand?"

Seeing that she would not yield, Laurie said no more. They walked on through the dewy brightness of the summer woods until the spire of the old church came in view, and then Ethel stopped and her face lost its color.

"Laurie, it is a serious thing, marriage. I am almost frightened at it now."

"'Gordon abides by what Gordon does,'" he quoted. "You have promised, Ethel; you must not break your word."

"I have no thought of doing so," she replied, haughtily; "but I am frightened. I had forgotten how solemn a thing marriage is. We are going into a church, and churches always seem to me so near to heaven. O, Laurie, Laurie!" she cried, "marriage lasts until death, and I am not sure if I love you well enough."

But he endeavored to calm her.

"My darling Ethel, you are nervous. You are usually brave, my love; you must not lose courage. Ethel, like other young girls, have you ever dreamed of your wedding-day?"

"Not often," she replied.

“Did you ever think it would be like this—walking through a dewy summer wood, the morning air fresh and sweet on your face, the song of the birds in your ears, the flowers, like a bevy of fair bride-maids, blooming around you?”

“No,” she answered; “I never dreamed of such a wedding as this.”

They entered the churchyard. and once more Laurie Nugent asked her to throw the passion-flowers away. Once more she refused; and by the green graves of the silent dead, Sir Leonard’s daughter—bright, beautiful, proud Ethel Gordon—passed on her way to the marriage altar.

## CHAPTER. XVIII.

ETHEL GORDON never forgot that old church of St, Ann's—a gray old building with tapering spire. As she entered, she seemed to bring with her the fragrance of the limes and the wild flowers.

At first it seemed as though the church were filled with a gray, soft gloom; and then, at the east end, Ethel saw a great stained-glass window, a very marvel of richness and color. The sun was shining full upon it, and great patches of purple and crimson, of orange and blue, of violet and green, lay on the floor, on the carved oaken seats, on chancel and nave. There were figures of triumphant saints on the window—saints with palm-branches and golden crowns. In after years she found each one impressed upon her memory. There was a silence—a stillness—a holy calm that seemed to be breathed from heaven; it was broken only by the song of the birds outside and the rustling of the leaves in the wind.

Ethel knelt down, her heart beating fast with emotion. What she had said was perfectly true—she had not reflected upon the solemn aspect of marriage; and it came to her like a shock. Revenge upon Helen Digby! No such thoughts could live in that holy calm; they fled from her, leaving the one fact bare—that she was about to become Laurie Nugent's wife. It came upon her almost like a shock. Even then, late as it was, she would have abandoned her project—she would have given up all idea of revenge and of marriage. Something of this Laurie Nugent must have read in her face, for he grasped her hand, whispering,—

“It is too late now; we must go on with it, my queen.”

She looked at the pictured faces of the saints with golden crowns—a wild idea took possession of her to cry out to some one to save her—that she been entrapped, over persuaded—that she did not love the man she was going to marry ; and again the keen instinct of his passionate love told Laurie Nugent the nature of her thoughts.

“You are filled with nervous fancies, my dear Ethel. Hark ! the very birds seem to sing more joyfully because it is our wedding-day.”

While he was saying the words a white-haired minister entered, and Laurie Nugent and Ethel went up to the altar together—the altar that was beneath the great eastern window, from which the mystical lights were falling. Two witnesses were there, but Laurie Nugent never even saw them ; they were servants from the rectory, whom the rector had told to be present. Laurie Nugent never saw them, for his whole attention was engrossed by his young bride. For the first time he noticed her dress—a soft, shining violet silk ; and just where she stood the light from the stained glass window fell upon her—one great dash of purple lay at her feet, a bar of crimson quivered on her dress, and on the beautiful head there shone a glow of gold. Her lovely face was pale with emotion, yet it shone like a fair flower amidst the mystical lights—fairer than the pictured faces of the saints ; and in her hand she still held the dewy passion flowers.

No artist ever dreamed of a picture more fair. Laurie Nugent’s eyes lingered upon her ; and then the solemn, beautiful marriage service commenced.

“Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband ?”

As she gave one glance at the golden crowns of the saints, and one at the white-haired minister, whose head was so reverently bent, the impulse again seized her to cry out ; but Laurie Nugent looked at her, and held her hand tightly, and she said the words that made her his wife.

She bent her head when the rector uttered the blessing, and at that moment a sudden gleam of the sun threw a crimson light over the bowed head, filling the young husband's heart with dread.

"Come away from that window, Ethel," he said. "I cannot bear to see you in the midst of those changing lights."

She obeyed him ; and then, in a few minutes the ceremony was ended. He left her kneeling there, while he gave the rector such a fee as astonished him, and one to each of the witnesses. He went into the vestry, and Mr. Byran shook him by the hand.

"I wish you every happiness," he said ; "and I must ask you to pardon my saying that I have never seen a more lovely bride. Be kind and loyal to her."

Then he went away ; but for long afterwards the rector remembered the fair young girl, as she stood amidst the changing lights, with the passion-flowers in her hand.

It was all over—proud, beautiful, bright Ethel Gordon was Laurie Nugent's wife. It seemed to her like a dream. She and her husband walked, hand in hand, down the broad path, and then he noticed that all the glowing color was dying from the lovely face, and that the hand he held in his own was trembling.

"Ethel," he said gently, "you must not give way now. You are tired—faint, perhaps ; all this has been too much for you. See, here is a large tree ; sit down under the shade of it."

There was a little mound under the tree, and she sat down upon it, Laurie by her side. The rest revived her. He looked anxiously in her face.

"You are better now, my queen," he said. "Ethel, I can hardly believe it—it is our wedding-day. I look in your lovely, flower-like face, and I say to myself that it is my wife's face. I hold this white hand in mine, and say I,

this is my wife's hand ; but I do not realize it all—I hardly believe it : it seems to me incredible that I should have won my queen, with her royal dower of proud young beauty."

They sat for a few minutes in silence, and then Laurie took the passion-flowers from her.

"I shall keep these until I die," he said, "remembering always that you held them while we were married. And now, my darling, give me one kiss. Raise your sweet, fair face to mine ; dearly as I have loved you, I have hardly dared to touch it. I may kiss my wife's face, Ethel?"

She raised it, and he wondered again at its exquisite beauty ; the faint flush of returning color was more dainty than the bloom of a wild rose. He bent his head reverently, and kissed her lips.

"My wife," he whispered, "my beautiful queen, I could not love you more. And now, Ethel, time is flying—we must return. We will part at the gate that leads to the woods. You, my darling, had better return through the woods, lingering a little on your way, for I must return to the hotel first. If you are there by eleven I will have everything ready for you."

"We will see Miss Digby at once," she said, with a quiet smile.

He did not think it was of any use to tell her the truth just then.

"Yes, we will see her, and give her the greatest surprise she has ever had in all her life. What will she say when she knows that I am your husband, and that we are going to Austria?"

Ethel laughed ; and then it struck her that the laugh seemed out of harmony with the brightness and beauty of that calm summer morning.

"What time shall we start?" she asked.

Laurie had thought of an excellent plan, as he imagined.

He would get her away from St. Ina's under the pretext of starting at once for Austria. She would not know what tickets he had purchased, and he would not tell her they were on the road to Liverpool until they had gone some distance, and then it would be too late for her to offer any remonstrance. He thought that was the wisest and most suitable plan that he could adopt.

He lingered for a few minutes longer, talking of Helen Digby, dwelling on the keenness of her disappointment, and then it was time to go. The church clock struck nine, and an old-fashioned chime played directly afterward.

Suddenly Ethel gave a little cry; she had struck her hand against the corner of a stone that was hidden in the grass, and had bruised the tender skin.

"I did not know that this was a grave," she said, rising with a shudder.

She parted the long, thick grass, and looked at the broken stone.

"We have been sitting on a child's grave, Laurie—a child who died many years before we were born. We have been talking about love with death so near to us!"

He would not own that her words startled him, but they did. He drew her gently away, and then he bent and kissed the little bruised hand.

"My sweet wife!" he said, "you are nervous and tired. You have strange fancies this morning, but you will soon forget them all. Now we must part."

They had reached the little gate that led to the woods—a great elm grew near and overshadowed it.

"You will be home, then, by eleven, Ethel?" he said.

"Yes," she replied—"and then for our grand *denouement*. Helen Digby may bid farewell to hope of ever being my father's wife, Laurie."



“She may indeed,” he agreed; and then they stood for a few moments under the great elm-tree.

For years afterward Laurie Nugent saw Ethel in his dreams as he saw her then, the sunlight falling on her, her sweet, flowerlike face smiling on him, the fair head proudly raised as she bade him farewell—“only for a few hours,” he thought.

For one minute he held her in his arms. He kissed her lips and whispered,—

“I love you ten thousand times better than my own life, my beautiful queen!”

Then he moved away, and she watched him as he walked with rapid steps down the high-road; and no warning, no presentiment came to her of how they should meet again.

## CHAPTER XIX.

ETHEL watched the tall figure of her husband until he was out of sight, and then she opened the gate and passed through into the woods. She had nearly two hours to linger there. She took out her pretty jewelled watch, Sir Leonard's last present, and looked at it; it was five minutes past nine. She could walk to St. Ina's easily in half an hour, so that she had plenty of time to dream by the brook that was rippling near her.

Amidst the glory of the golden sunshine and the gleam of the deep green foliage she sat down to rest and to dream. The flowers were blooming around her, the air was full of music and perfume, the brook was hastening onward, and she lost herself in the keen, passionate delight which nature's beauty ever gave to her. She surrendered herself to her dream. Had she done right, after all? Would Sir Leonard be pleased when he saw her handsome husband, or would he be cross? She remembered that he never looked angrily on her yet, and she said to herself, with a smile, that he never would. Then her fancy strayed to Helen Digby—Helen, whom she was so soon and so surely to triumph over—Helen, who was so soon to be deprived of all her unjustly-gained advantages.

Ethel was so noble and generous by nature that she could not quite rejoice over the downfall of her enemy. She had married in haste purposely to crush her, but the generous heart could go no further. When once Helen Digby was crushed, then Ethel's own hand would raise her. Only let her give up the absurd idea of marrying Sir Leonard and reigning at Fountayne, and then Ethel would

do anything for her. She was not one of those who could pursue a worsted foe, or triumph maliciously over a fallen enemy. She was too true a Gordon for that. Even now, when the hour of her triumph and revenge was at hand, she half relented. Yet she said to herself that Helen Digby had provoked her own fate. She should not have come between her and her father's love—between her and her domain of Fountayne.

The beauty of the morning deepened; the sun shone more brightly, the bees hummed more loudly. The time was passing, and still she sat by the brook, lost in her dreams. There had come to her a sudden revelation of the sanctity of marriage—how, henceforth and for ever, she was to be true to Laurie—to love, honor, and obey him—to seek happiness by his side, and she was almost frightened at what she had done.

“I wish,” she said to herself, “that I had thought more of the sanctity of marriage, and less of revenge.”

Suddenly she remembered the time, and, looking again at her watch, found it was half past ten. She must walk to St. Ina's by eleven. Good-by to the leafy shade, the rippling brook, the blooming flowers, the sweetly singing birds!

She hastened through the woods. The wind stirred the rich brown hair, and brought a lovely color into her face. In the distance she saw the shining waters of the restless sea; and she said to herself the hour of her triumph and her enemy's downfall was at hand.

She reached the grounds of the hotel, and, crossing the lawn, it struck her that there was an unusual stir and subdued excitement about the place. The visitors were standing in groups of twos and threes, talking eagerly and earnestly. She caught a glimpse of the manager; his face was pale and anxious. As she approached the principal entrance, she heard him say,—

“I would not have had such a disgrace to the house for any amount of money.”

She smiled to herself, little dreaming what that disgrace was.

When she entered the hall, the manager and his wife and several of the servants were gathered together, and were talking in low tones. At the end of the hall she saw a policeman, and farther on she caught a glimpse of some one bound and handcuffed—she could not distinguish who it was. It did not concern her, she thought to herself, and she entered the drawing-room on the left. She hardly gave another thought to the matter.

“Some of the servants have been doing wrong,” she concluded. “I hope it is not that dark-eyed Jane.”

There was a large pier-glass in the room, and her attention was caught by her own picturesque beauty. The wind had arranged the rich brown hair after its own fashion—it had brought a lovely color into her face, and a bright light into her eyes; she smiled as she looked at herself, and the smile died slowly away. Long years were to pass before she ever saw the same proud beauty on her face again.

Where was Miss Digby, and where was her husband, Laurie Nugent?

“He was to have been here at eleven,” she thought.

She listened, thinking that she heard his footstep, but the sound died away. It seemed useless to wait any longer. She crossed the hall again to go to the room where Miss Digby usually sat, and as she passed along she heard a man, whom she knew afterward to have been a detective, say,—

“He must be taken to London; I have my orders. If he continues to resist, he must be strapped down. Go he must and shall!”

Then one of the men-servants had been discovered

doing something wrong! She hoped it was not the pale-faced waiter who had an invalid wife, or the cheerful obliging one who never seemed to tire. The cry of a man's voice reached her as she passed along.

"I hope they will be merciful to him," said Ethel. "He has been stealing, I suppose. Nothing can be more contemptible than a thief."

She opened the door of the room where Miss Digby generally spent the morning with Lady Stafton. Both were there—Lady Stafton looking unusually excited, Miss Digby occupied with a piece of fancy-work; and Ethel could not help seeing that the hands of the latter trembled. Helen looked up from her work at the beautiful flushed face of the girl.

"Ethel," she asked, "where have you been? I do not wish to seem hard, but I must say, my dear, that I do not think it is quite right of you to absent yourself for so many hours without saying anything to me. You must remember that you are in my charge; and you make me anxious."

Ethel laughed a low, sweet, musical laugh. How soon, how very soon this enemy of hers would be crushed—how soon she herself would triumph! It was the last time that she would dare to ask such questions.

"Where have you been, Ethel?" Miss Digby repeated.

"You will know quite soon enough," replied Ethel.

Her eyes fell on the ormolu clock; it was nearly half-past eleven. Where was her husband—strong, handsome Laurie Nugent? He was to take her hand and tell Helen Digby that they were married. It was fitting time and opportunity for such a scene. Why did he not come?"

"You know, my dear Ethel," pursued Helen, "that I never interfere with your actions needlessly. I know there is no real cause for anxiety; this place is so quiet

that you might be out for hours together and not see any one ; but, for the future, if you intend taking a long ramble, will you please mention it to me, that I may feel quite at ease ? ”

Ethel laughed again—there was so little need for such a promise. She, with her husband, would soon be far away. Helen Digby’s reign was almost over ; a few minutes more and the triumph would come. But where was her husband ?

“ He must be here soon,” she thought to herself. “ I am glad that Lady Stafton is present ; she will see my triumph.”

She looked at Helen Digby’s calm, kind face ; how soon its expression would be changed—how soon she would cease to have any place among them !

Where was Laurie ? Ethel was growing impatient ; this triumph of hers seemed very sweet now that it was so near at hand. What gratification to be able to look at her rival and say : “ I was left in your charge—given into your care—and you have failed completely. I am married, and am going straight to see my father ! ” The desire to make her disclosure increased. When she had humbled her rival, when she had taken from her her father’s love and all chance of ever reigning at Fountayne, she would be friendly with her, and kind enough. Ethel laughed again as she thought of the thunderbolt that was so soon to fall among them.

“ You seem greatly amused, Ethel,” said Helen Digby. “ Have you seen anything that has pleased you ? ”

“ No ; but I expect to be very much amused Miss Digby, and I am laughing in anticipation.”

Then she became silent, and the ladies went on talking together. She heard the words, “ dreadful affair.” “ sad disgrace,” repeated over and over again, but did not feel sufficient interest to inquire what they meant.

Time was passing—it was now half-past eleven. Where was Laurie? She rose impatiently from her seat—she felt warm and flushed. Surely the room or the morning must be very close. She pushed the hair back from her brow, and Helen Digby, catching a glimpse of her, said,—

“Ethel, you look so strange—not at all like yourself.”

But Ethel moved impatiently away. Where was he? Why did he not come and give her her triumph? It was not kind of him to keep her so long. She walked to the window, and stood looking out. She saw the lawn and the bright flowers, the gleaming, restless sea, the dark, shady woods. Beyond these last was the church in which that morning she had been married. Where was Laurie, and why did he not come? Lady Stafton looked at the beautiful, restless face.

“Have you heard of this sad affair, Miss Gordon?” she inquired.

But Ethel was not in the least interested.

“I have not heard of any affair, Lady Stafton,” she replied; “but I thought, as I came through the house, there was something unusual going on.”

“You may well say unusual,” observed Lady Stafton, who delighted in a little gossip. “I have never heard of such a thing in my life. If it get into the papers it will ruin the Queen’s Hotel.”

“It is sure to be in the papers,” said Miss Digby. “Everything of that kind is published—and so it ought to be.”

“It is not often that I am so completely deceived,” remarked Lady Stafton. “It will be a warning to me not to put implicit faith in any one again.”

Still Ethel had not taken the least interest in the conversation; all that she was thinking of was Laurie, and why he did not come.

“It is quite as well, Miss Gordon,” pursued Lady Staf-

ton, "that you were not here this morning. There has been a terrible scene. You were fortunate to miss it. It will haunt me for many long days. Poor Mr. Nugent! I cannot help pitying him, after all."

Ethel's listless indifference fled—strained, painful attention took its place.

"Mr. Nugent," she said, in a low voice—"what of him?"

"It is a terrible thing," put in Miss Digby. "In conceiving a dislike for him, I little knew how true my instinct was."

Ethel had clasped her hands so tightly that the tender skin was bruised, so keen was her impatience, so terrible her suspense.

"What has he done?" she asked, in the same low voice.

"Really, my dear Ethel," replied Lady Stafton, "the story is hardly fit for a young lady to hear. I told Miss Digby that I considered it providential that you were out of the way when it all happened."

Ethel curbed her impatience as well as she could; her limbs trembled, and the red marks on the white hands deepened.

"I think," she said, "you may tell me, whatever it is. I am sure to hear of it—perhaps I had better hear it first from you."

Lady Stafton looked pleased. Ethel had tried to speak in her ordinary voice, but she had failed; and Helen Digby wondered at the strange sound.

"It seems, my dear," began Lady Stafton, "that the gentleman we have known as Mr. Nugent is no Nugent after all. His name is Laurie Carrington. He was manager of a bank in London. What was the bank called, Helen?"



In that profound silence Miss Digby's voice sounded clear and distinct.

"The Anglo-Scottish Bank," she replied, briefly.

"Yes, that was it. He was a young man of good family, and of great ability. He was chosen as manager of this bank. It was perhaps not quite a safe position for so young a man—but then they trusted him implicitly."

Lady Stafton paused for a few minutes; the voice was hardly human in which Ethel said, hoarsely,—

"You have not told me what he has done."

"I was coming to that, my dear," explained Lady Stafton, complacently. "Mr. Carrington—to give him his proper name,—seems, from what I hear, to have got among a 'fast' set, and to have spent a great deal of money in gambling. The end of it was, he appropriated the bank funds—he forged a check for five thousand pounds, and absconded with the money."

Ethel spoke no more, but from her white lips came a gasping sigh.

"He went away with the money, and every one thought he would try to leave the country. The case was put into the hands of the detectives, and all the seaports were carefully watched. He was aware of that, and, knowing this quiet place, decided upon coming here, intending to get across to France if he could. While they have been searching for him in all the great towns—London, Liverpool, Bristol, Hull—he has been quietly hiding here."

Another great gasping sigh; but the white lips never opened to speak.

"I remember seeing in Tuesday's *Times* that the police were on the track of the forger, Laurie Carrington, and hoped soon to effect his capture. Little did I suspect who Laurie Carrington was. However, it appears the paragraph was quite correct. The detectives came early this morning, and there was a terrible scene."

“I cannot imagine,” interrupted Helen Digby, “why he stayed here so long. He might have crossed the Channel and have made his escape days ago when he knew his danger. I cannot think why he remained here.”

Ethel knew. Love for her, the charm of her fatal beauty, the desire of winning her for his wife—it was for this he had stayed, and had placed himself in such deadly peril.

“That also puzzles me,” said Lady Stafton—“indeed, I overheard one of the detectives ask him about it, and his despairing look I shall never forget. It really was a terrible scene, Ethel.”

“Will you tell me all about it?” she asked, in the same unearthly voice; and Lady Stafton, nothing loath, continued,—

“The detectives came early this morning; they asked for Mr. Carrington, and were told that no such gentleman was staying at the hotel. Mr. Nugent came in at that very moment, and they seized him. ‘This is our man,’ they said; and, Ethel, I shall never forget the despair that came over his face. At first he tried bravado, and declared it was all a mistake: but that failed him; and then, when he heard the charge upon which he was apprehended, and saw the handcuffs, and that there was no chance of escape, he burst into tears. Oh, Ethel, if you had seen him! He fell back, like one half fainting; and then it was discovered that he was greatly disguised. His false mustaches fell off, and a wig of chestnut curls—he is dark, not fair—I always thought it strange that dark eyes and chestnut hair should go together. He looked very handsome when the false hair was taken away. We all came away, for having received him as an equal, it was very hard to witness his humiliation. He said something to me as I left the hall, but I did not hear him distinctly. The manager is much distressed; he says it will ruin the place.”

"It was a strange idea for a forger to hide himself here," said the quiet voice of Helen Digby. "I can understand his coming, but I cannot think why he remained."

"Has he gone away?" asked Ethel. The pallor on her face and the wild despair in her eyes increased; but her head was averted—neither of the ladies noticed her.

"I do not know," answered Lady Stafton; "one of the servants told me some little time since that Mr. Carrington was still in the hall, handcuffed and bound. I did not like to ask any questions."

Just at that moment one of the lady visitors entered the room.

"Mr. Carrington is gone," she said. "I never expected to witness such a scene. What do you think he did, Lady Stafton? I am quite sure the man is mad. Just before he was leaving the hall he asked permission to have his hands loosed for a few moments. The request was granted, and he drew from his breast-pocket a bunch of faded passion-flowers, and flung them on the ground. 'Take those to my wife,' he said; and then another idea seemed to strike him—he raised them and kissed them, and I saw tears in his eyes."

"Faded passion-flowers!" exclaimed Lady Stafton. "Then the man has something of poetry in him, after all!"

---

## CHAPTER XX.

ETHEL listened attentively to the conversation that was being carried on between Lady Stafton and the newly entered lady visitor. Presently there was a pause for some minutes, and then Helen Digby said,—

“Mr. Nugent requested the passion-flowers to be taken to his wife. I did not know that he was married—much less that he had a wife here.”

“He has no wife,” asserted the lady visitor. “It was all nonsense; he said it only for a sensation. Yet the man looked so heart-broken—so despairing—one might have thought he was leaving some fair, beloved young bride. I shall never forget his face.”

“I should say myself,” observed Lady Stafton, complacently, “that a man like Mr. Nugent would find great difficulty in contracting a suitable marriage. He has all the self-possession and well-bred manner, the cultivated taste and refinement of a gentleman of our class. Yet, in our class he could hardly find a wife. Who would marry him? Of course, marriage is out of the question now; justice has too strong a hold of him. So our handsome friend was a thief and a forger after all! Well, it is a lesson on the folly of forming a promiscuous acquaintance.”

“I have often wondered,” said the lady-visitor, “how this Mr. Nugent came to know you, Lady Stafton.”

“He introduced himself to me under false pretenses; he told me he was an intimate friend of Lady Delamaine’s. I ought to have been more on my guard; but he seemed so pleasant and well-bred. How was I to imagine, meeting him here, that he was a criminal flying from justice? I cannot conceive what he meant by speaking of his wife—there was no lady staying here with him.”

“No, it was all nonsense,” affirmed the lady-visitor. “Every one is wondering, though, why, when he was in such deadly danger, he should have remained here so long. My husband talks of going away at once. It has been a shock to us, for we really liked the young man. He was pleasant, handsome, and well-bred, with a certain natural elegance of his own which made conversation with him very agreeable;” and after a few more words the lady departed

to discuss with some one else "the terrible story of this Mr. Nugent."

"I am afraid," said Lady Stafton, as the door closed, "that we have been very imprudent, Helen. I wish we had never allowed Mr. Nugent, or Carrington, to speak to us."

"There has been no harm done, fortunately," returned Miss Digby. "I am thankful matters are no worse. The incident has made me very miserable. I cannot bear to think of that handsome, pleasant, clever Mr. Nugent in a felon's cell."

Ethel listened to every word. Fortunately no one spoke to her. For all power of speech had gone from her. A great blinding mist came before her eyes, shutting out the shining sea, the green lawn, the blooming flowers—a blood-red mist; a roar as of rushing waters filled her ears, her face grew white and cold as the face of the dead. She would have fallen but for the desperate grasp with which she clung to the woodwork of the window.

The anguish of each moment seemed endless; the light, careless voices discussed every detail of the event, and told how Laurie Nugent, the man she had married, was a forger and a thief.

How did she live through it? In after years her wonder was that the shock did not kill her. It was her husband they had carried away to prison; the gleam of the wedding-ring on her hand caught her attention and turned her faint with a cold, terrible dread. There was the purple bruise made by the gravestone only three hours ago. Oh, fatal hour—fatal omen! This was the revenge for which she had parted with her liberty, her freedom—for which she had married in secret to repent at leisure. This was her revenge—revenge which had recoiled most terribly on herself. This sweet, pitying woman was the one she had intended to crush under her feet, and the man who was to have helped her triumph was a forger and a thief.

Another great gasping sigh ; her strength seemed to be leaving her—her heart beat painfully—her limbs trembled. Did ever summer sun shine on such a woeful, despairing face ?

“Ethel,” said Miss Digby, “you must be tired after your long walk. The bell will ring directly for luncheon, and you will want to arrange your dress.”

She dared not turn round lest that ghastly face of hers should be exposed to view.

“You had better go to your own room, my dear,” suggested Helen. “I expect to hear the bell ring every minute.”

Slowly—for the strange trembling had not left her limbs—Ethel walked away, and neither of the ladies noticed that she groped with her hands before her, as one suddenly struck blind.

She had just strength to reach her own room. She caught one glimpse of her face in the mirror, where so short a time since she had seen a vision of fair, youthful, blushing loveliness. She saw a white face there now, with pale, trembling lips and a look of woeful fear in the violet eyes. It was as though some blight had fallen over the proud young beauty and laid it low. She stood for a few minutes looking at that ghastly face, and before her, in letters of fire, she saw the words “Forger and thief.” Look where she would, turn where she would, the fiery letters were there, burning her eyes, burning her brain.

“Forger and thief !” Oh, cruel fate !—cruel cheat !—cruel destiny ! She took the wedding-ring from her finger and trampled it, with a passionate cry of anger and scorn, under her foot. She, Ethel Gordon—one of the grand old Gordons of Fountayne—married to a forger and thief ! She, one of a dauntless race whose warriors had died on the battle-field, and whose women had held their own in times of deadliest danger and peril—a grand old *debonnair* race

who had laughed at all things low and mean—she the wife of a thief, of a man who had passed under a false name, who had worn a disguise, who had fled from justice when pursuit was hot after him, who had not scrupled to sacrifice her young life, her young beauty, her future, to his selfish love? She, Ethel—Gordon no longer—was the wife of a criminal.

Low passionate cries came from her lips—cries of hopeless, impatient despair. She tried in vain to stop them, she buried her face in her hands; but if she had not so cried she must have died.

As she sat there she almost hated the beauty of the summer morning, the song of the birds, the fragrance of the sweet flowers. As in a dream, the pictured faces of the saints on the grand eastern window of St. Ann's Church came before her; she called to mind the holy calm and silence reigning within the sacred edifice; the solemn vows she had only that morning taken sounded again in her ears. The remembrance of it all surged through her heart and soul like the waves of an angry sea; her slender figure swayed like the leaf in the wind; and without word or cry, she fell, white and helpless, to the ground. The sunbeams played over her—through the open windows came the sweet breath of the climbing roses, but Ethel Gordon was insensible to both.

The bell rang for luncheon, and no Ethel came. Miss Digby looked anxiously for her.

"I am afraid the child has over-exerted herself," she said to Lady Stafton.

Her ladyship laughed.

"I am afraid, my dear, that Miss Gordon has a little attack of the Gordon temper. She left us without a word. You had better let her take her own way."

But Helen was not happy. She loved her beautiful, wayward, wilful charge: she bore patiently with her faults,

hoping for the time when Ethel would love her in return. She could not bear that the girl should go without her luncheon because, perhaps, she was tired with her long ramble.

"I found fault with her," she said—"I must not forget that; and she is not accustomed to it—my poor Ethel!"

So, despite Lady Stafton's laughter, she selected a bunch of bloomy, purple grapes, a ripe peach, and a glass of Madeira, and took them herself to Ethel's room, together with a book she thought would amuse her. She rapped, but no answer came; and then Helen opened the door. No beautiful face turned proudly to see what she wanted. Ethel Gordon lay white, cold, and silent on the floor.

For one minute Helen thought she was dead.

"Ethel, my darling," she cried kneeling by her side—"Ethel, what is the matter?"

There came no answer from the white lips, and Helen, with kind, caressing touch, parted the long rich, brown hair from the white brow, and then raised the girl in her arms and laid her on the bed.

"It is but a fainting fit," she thought, "brought on probably by the heat and the long ramble she has taken in the woods."

She bathed the cold face with cold water, and when at last Ethel opened her eyes, it was to find her head pillowed on the kindly breast of the woman she had intended to crush beneath her feet—to find tender words, gentle caresses, devoted care from the woman she had hated with such fatal hate.

"My darling Ethel," said Helen Digby, "I am so pleased and thankful to find you better. I was sorely frightened when I found you lying on the floor. I hope you have not been ill long. Try to drink this wine."

She bent down, and with her kind, pitying lips she kissed the beautiful, colorless face.



“My darling child,” she resumed, “I did not know how dearly I loved you until I saw you lying helpless.”

Suddenly Ethel—proud Ethel, who had never sought a caress—flung her arms round Helen’s neck, buried her face on Helen’s breast, and clung to her with a passionate cry.

“O, Helen, Helen! take me home! Take me home, and let me die!”

Helen tried to calm her, feeling all the time alarmed at her state. Still she thought it was nothing more than the effects of a long walk in the heat of the sun.

“You must be more careful, my dear child,” she said; “those long rambles are too much for you.”

But Ethel only clung the more closely to her, crying again,—

“Take me home, Helen, and let me die!”

---

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE story of Mr. Nugent was a nine days’ wonder. Some people left the Queen’s Hotel in consequence of it. They were but few in number and those who remained found a never-ending subject of conversation. The manager in time recovered from his anxiety. Helen Digby had written a full account of the whole matter to Sir Leonard, asking his advice whether, under the circumstances, he would wish Ethel and herself to remain at St. Ina’s.

In answer Sir Leonard wrote to say that he could not see why the Nugent incident should disturb them, and that, as Ethel did not seem to be quite well, it would be better for them to remain, as they had originally intended. He was sorry to hear that Ethel was not well. In all proba-

bility the warm weather had been prejudicial to her ; therefore they could not do better than remain by the sea. Miss Digby was pleased with the decision—she had rather dreaded going to Fountayne.

On the morning that she received the letter she hastened with it to Ethel's room. The girl was dressed and seated by the window, her eyes fixed dreamily on the trees ; she turned her beautiful, colorless face to Helen, and a faint smile came to her white lips.

“I have a letter from Sir Leonard,” announced Helen, gently.

The time had been when she would have risen with a glad heart and a bright face to take the letter ; now she murmured a few listless words and looked out again over the trees.

“I will read it to you,” said Helen ; and standing by the girl's side, she read the letter.

Ethel made no comment. Miss Digby could not even tell whether she had taken note of the words.

“If you are willing, Ethel,” she observed, gently, “I shall consider that as settled. We are to remain here.”

“I am willing,” returned Ethel ; and Helen noted with pain the listless manner, the listless voice.

“I am so thankful, Ethel,” said Miss Digby, “that you have escaped a long illness. Last week when I found you lying here I was alarmed. I think now your ailment must have been a kind of sunstroke. You were certainly quite delirious for a time.”

A faint flush rose to her face.

“Delirious was I, Helen? What did I talk about?”

“Going home to die. You made me nervous, I assure you. You are better now—are you not Ethel?”

“Yes,” allowed the sad young voice, “I am better, Helen. I am quite willing to stay in my room for a few days, if you think it better for me ; but will you always

bring or send me the London newspapers as soon as they come—as early as you can? I want to see them.”

Miss Digby smiled.

“I thought you did not care for newspapers. You shall have them as soon as they come.”

She laid her hand on the girl's white brow, and Ethel, taking it in her own, kissed it.

“You are so kind,” she said, humbly—“so kind and good.”

“It is easy to be kind where we love very dearly,” responded Miss Digby; but, as she left the room, she half wished that Ethel had some of the old petulant, wilful manner, and half defiant pride.

“I do not like to see her so changed,” she said to herself; “nor can I understand it.”

No fever, with its disquieting dreams, had come to Ethel. For one whole day after that terrible discovery she had lain with her face turned from the sunshine, longing for death to free her from despair; but she was young and strong, death came not, and she rose, when the next morning dawned, the wreck of her bright, beautiful self. It was as though every hope, every energy was paralyzed. Despair conquered her. Look which way she would, there was no release from her fate, no help, no aid; the chains she had so willingly put on must weigh her down until she died. She had, perhaps, many years of a long, lingering, joyless, dreary existence before her, and she turned heart-sick from the contemplation of it. Seasons would change, the sun rise and set, the tide ebb and flow, but she would never know hope or brightness again.

Her thoughts were as a weight of lead; they dragged her down to the earth and kept her there. Her sorrow was not like one for which time has a cure; time could do nothing for her but add to the greatness of her sorrow by showing her the greatness of her folly. She was like one

stunned and paralyzed by some great blow. Illness that brought with it pain would almost have been welcome to her ; anything would have seemed better than this dull paralysis that had stricken every nerve.

---

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE London papers were brought to Ethel, and she searched them anxiously for news of her husband. She found it at last. His trial was to take place on the third of August, and no hope was given that he would be leniently dealt with. Until the third of August her life passed like a dream—she neither smiled nor laughed, and seldom spoke ; she sat like one in a trance—in a listless dream.

On the day of the third she rose with the dawn ; she knelt by the side of her bed, with clasped hands and bowed head, full of deep, unutterable misery.

She had driven herself almost crazy with fear, wondering what she should do if her husband were set free and came to claim her—if the story of her disgraceful marriage were ever made known.

“ I should kill myself,” she said, with clinched hands. “ I could not face the exposure and the shame.”

The third of August was a bright, warm, beautiful day, but Ethel sat in her own room, silent, melancholy, listless, wondering what Laurie was doing—what was happening. Her heart turned faint and cold as she pictured him in the felon’s dock, his handsome face white with shame, his head bent—*forger, thief*, waiting to receive his sentence.

She did not love him—she never had loved him—but all that evening she sat at her window watching the sun

set, and the moon rise—watching the stars while others slept, until the crimson dawn that looked so fair in the eastern sky broke once again over the earth.

He knew his fate by then ; sentence had been pronounced upon him ; and soon she should know it. Was he watching the rise of the early dawn through the prison bars ? Was he thinking of her, this forger and thief, who had loved her so passionately and so well ?

What would he do ? Would he write to her and claim her, or mercifully let her rest in peace ?

Ethel had not moved or stirred all night ; but, when Helen entered her room, she believed that her charge had just risen. When the girl turned round to her with a white, wan face, and great hollow circles round her eyes, Miss Digby uttered a little, startled cry.

“ You are not so well to-day, Ethel, I am sure,” she cried ; “ you have not slept well. I have brought you the *Times*.”

A blush that seemed to burn the beautiful face rose over it—Helen could not understand why. Ethel turned eagerly to her, and held out her hand for the newspaper.

“ Shall I stay with you ? ” she asked. “ I shall be very well pleased to spend the morning in your room.”

“ No, no, thank you, Helen,” she cried, eagerly ; “ I want to be alone.”

Helen lingered to perform two or three kindly offices for her, and the girls' impatience reached fever heat. Would she never go ? Would she never be able to open that paper and know her fate ? At last, with kindly words and an anxious look, Helen Digby went away.

Ethel was alone then, and the burning, trembling hands hastened to open the paper. There it was, in large letters—“ The trial of Laurie Carrington for theft and forgery.” The report of the trial occupied many columns ; she did not even look a single word.

It was surely the saddest, simplest story ever told of any man's downfall—so sad and so simple that, as she read it, tears filled her eyes, and fell on the paper—tears of pity for the thief and forger who had tempted her.

He came of a good family—the Carringtons of Oxford—and he was the only son of his mother—a widow. His father had once been a rich man, and he himself had received an excellent education ; he had distinguished himself at college, and had bidden fair to become a distinguished scholar. But his father was ruined by the failure of some mines in which he had risked the whole of his fortune, and Laurie was taken from college to be placed in the Anglo-Scottish Bank.

There he attracted notice by industry, perseverance, and honesty. By degrees he reached the highest post in the bank ; and although young, his talents were so great that he was made manager when the gentleman who had occupied that position died. There was before him a glorious future, and nothing marred it but his own folly ; he allowed himself to be tempted by the love of gambling. He lost, won, and lost again, principally on the race-course ; he gave himself up to all kinds of folly—took a large house, and lived in grand style—gave magnificent parties—meanwhile appropriating money that was not his own, intending at some future time to refund it. Then, in order to hide his defalcations, he purposely falsified the accounts ; and, when he found it impossible to hide his crime, he crowned it by forging a check for five thousand pounds, and running away with the money. The directors offered a large reward for his capture ; but for some time all hope of effecting it seemed vain. At last he was found at the Queen's Hotel, St. Ina's Bay, where he had been hiding in disguise ever since he had committed the crime ; and those in court wondered, as they heard this, why he had lingered in such deadly peril. No one knew and no one guessed the

story of his passionate love for beautiful, proud Ethel Gordon.

The trial would have been longer but that the prisoner made no defense. He pleaded guilty and asked for mercy—he was young, and had been sorely tempted. The directors were leniently inclined. Mr. Carrington had refunded the greater part of the money, and they were persecuting in the interests of justice only. But the judge was very severe with the prisoner. Several pleas for mercy his lordship said had been placed before him, but he did not think any of them ought to bias his decision. Still, he considered justice would be met if he sentenced the prisoner to ten years' penal servitude.

It was a perfectly just sentence ; but the report went on to tell of its effect upon the prisoner. His face grew ghastly white, and he trembled violently.

"Ten years!" he repeated. "Oh, my lord, have mercy on me!"

"You have had no mercy on yourself," the judge replied. "I can only hope that your punishment may be a warning to other young men who abuse the trust placed in them by their employers."

The report concluded with these words : "The prisoner, who seemed to feel his position acutely, was then removed from the dock."

Ethel read with burning eyes and quivering lips ; she did not miss a single word ; and when she had reached the conclusion the paper fell from her hands to the ground.

Ten years of penal servitude—ten years must elapse before he could claim her. Before he could see her again much might happen ; she might even die. Surely the misery of her secret would kill her before then ? And that was the story of the man she had married—the forger and thief ! A flush of hot indignation burned in her face. Surely, of all the crimes he had committed, the very worst

was to have betrayed, deceived, and married her—to have blighted her young life and sacrificed her to his own most selfish love.

As she sat there anger, pride, and despair doing fierce battle in her heart, Helen entered.

“Have you done with the Times, Ethel? there is quite a demand for the London papers this morning. It appears that Mr. Nugent’s trial is in it. Did you notice it? Have you read it?”

“I have read it,” was the brief reply.

“I want to read it to Lady Stafton. She takes great interest in it. I hope the sentence is not a heavy one.”

“Ten years’ penal servitude!” said Ethel.

And Helen was puzzled by the strange sound of her voice. She took up the newspaper, and went away.

Not once that day did Ethel quit her room. She could not have borne the careless discussions, the weary repetition of each detail, the pity, the blame, the wonder.

“I should think,” she said once to herself, “that he must hate me. If he had not stopped here for my sake, he would not have been in prison now.”

Helen Digby read the report of the trial to her friend. They both agreed that it was a just sentence.

“I shall always wonder what he meant by throwing down those faded flowers for his wife,” said Lady Stafton, who enjoyed a little romance. “He cannot surely have had a wife hidden here.”

“No,” observed Helen; “you see in the report of the trial he is spoken of as a single man. It was merely a bit of sensationalism—nothing more. I think we have discussed him long enough. I am not happy about Ethel; I cannot imagine what has happened to her.”

“Is she ill again?” asked Lady Stafton.

“She has not been well for some time. This morning, when I went into her room, I was quite startled; her face



was colorless, and there were great hollow circles round her eyes. I assure you she is losing her youth and her beauty; she looks like one who has lived through years of sorrow and care."

"What does she complain of?" inquired Lady Stafton.

"Nothing. If she would only complain, I should feel much happier."

"Perhaps it is nothing, after all," said Lady Stafton.

"I am anxious to believe it; but what can have changed her so entirely? You remember how bright and beautiful she was—what an exquisite color she had—how bright her eyes shone? All that has disappeared; she looks like one who weeps all night and watches all day."

"Perhaps she is a victim to some love-affair," suggested Lady Stafton.

"No; I must have known something of it if that had been the case. She has never been in love. You forget how young she is."

"Is she grieving over her father's absence?" asked Lady Stafton.

"I think not; when I speak of his return, it does not seem to interest her. She seems always the same—tired wearied, listless, inert, languid—she who used to be all life and vivacity; I cannot account for the change."

"You should try to rouse her, Helen: it will not do to give way to her."

"So I do; I talk to her, but she never answers—she never seems to hear. Whenever I go into her room I find her sitting at the window, looking with tired, dreamy eyes over the sea. If I take her a book to read, she returns it to me; I am sure to discover she has forgotten all about it. How am I to rouse her? What am I to do?"

"Something must have caused this change," said Lady Stafton, musingly; "you must try to find out what that something is."

“She has changed even toward me,” continued Miss Digby. “She used to dislike me very much; she treated me with a kind of half wilful, proud defiance that amused even while it pained me. All that has gone now; she is so submissive that she obeys me implicitly: more than once she clasped her arms round my neck, laid her head on my shoulder, and wept until I really thought her heart would break.”

“I should write to Sir Leonard and ask for his advice, Helen. Perhaps St. Ina’s does not suit her; she would be better at Fountayne.”

“I asked her yesterday if she would like to return there, but she did not take the least interest in the matter. I am afraid, if she continues in this way, she will lose either her reason or her life.”

“Go back to Fountayne, Helen; the journey, the change of scene, must be beneficial to her.”

“I think it would,” agreed Miss Digby; “I will see what Ethel says.”

As she had anticipated, Ethel appeared quite indifferent.

“If you are willing, Ethel,” Helen began, “I should like to go to Fountayne this week.”

“I am quite willing,” was the listless reply.

“If you would prefer to remain here, we can easily do so. I should like you to be pleased.”

“I shall be content with any decision you may make, Helen,” said Ethel.

And, looking into the wan, white face, and noting the shadows in her violet eyes, Helen Digby thought to herself that the heart of proud, beautiful Ethel Gordon was most surely broken.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE was considerable excitement when Ethel Gordon once more crossed the threshold of her father's house. The servants looked at her in wonder. What had happened to their bright young mistress? She had left them only a few short months since, and then no flower had been fairer or more blooming. She returned to them, her face colorless, her eyes shadowed with sorrow, the brightness gone from her; there were no more smiles, no more sweet snatches of song.

"I can hardly believe," said the butler—an important person at Fountayne—"that it is Miss Gordon; nor can I think what has so completely changed her."

They hoped that it was only fatigue from her journey, and that in a few days she would be her own bright, capricious, charming self again. But days passed on, weeks elapsed, and no change came to her; and they realized the fact that her girlish gayety had gone from her for ever.

The servants had been tempted at first to resent Miss Digby's rule, but after a time they acknowledged that it was well that she was there. The wilful, pretty imperious caprices that had made the amusement and had caused the despair of the whole household were all over. Neither rule nor power had any more interest for Ethel. Those who went to ask her questions, hoping that she would evince some little interest, all received the same answer, the same listless reply. It was either, "I know nothing of it," or, "You had better ask Miss Digby."

The old housekeeper would listen with tears in her eyes.

“If she would only scold or go into passions like she used to do, I should not care; but what I cannot bear is to see her sitting there, looking as though the world were all over for her.”

It had been a terrible trial for Ethel, that coming home. She had been so completely queen and mistress, her reign had been so undisputed, she had been so dearly loved. Life had been bright for her—bright with vague, pleasing hopes. They were all blighted now. She had left home the fair, proud descendant of a grand old race; she had returned the wife of a forger and a thief. She had left Fountayne one of the happiest, gayest, brightest of human beings; she had returned without an interest in life.

It had been terrible to her that coming home; the sight of the familiar, much-loved spot seemed to show her, more clearly than ever, what depths of degradation separated her from the gay, proud, young Ethel who had been mistress there. She walked under the shade of the tall, spreading trees, and the rustle of the wind among the branches seemed to have a voice. That voice said to her: “You are the first degenerated Gordon. Your predecessors were faithful and true; you are the first who has married a forger and a thief.”

She walked in the long picture-gallery, and the fair, proud faces of the Gordons, long since dead, seemed to look down on her with scornful pity. “A forger and a thief!” She fancied each proud mouth repeated the words; and she passed along the gallery, pale, frightened, the shadow of her former self. In after years she tried to remember how many deaths she had died before the golden autumn had faded into chill winter. She dreaded lest this terrible secret of hers should be known. She would have suffered any torture, she would have endured any punishment rather than that. What if Laurie should

write and claim her, saying that she was his wife? True, it could do him no good—it could not save him from the consequences of his crime. Perhaps, remembering how young she was and how completely he had deceived her, he might be merciful, and spare her.

She was so innocent, so inexperienced, that she did not know where to write to him. She had an idea of sending him a passionate appeal for silence and compassion; but how should she address her letter? Her life had passed so happily until now. She knew in some vague kind of way, that there were sin, sorrow, and crime in the world—that life had a shady side all unknown to the innocent, she knew that there were prisons and scaffolds—but it was all in the vaguest fashion. She had never seen anything of crime, and now she was suddenly brought face to face with it. Her own husband—the man whom she had married in secrecy and haste—lay in a felon's cell. The man through whose aid and help she had intended to triumph over her rival was bound hand and foot in the trammels of stern, terrible justice.

What should she do if ever he wrote to claim her? She raised her beautiful, despairing face to the bright heavens.

“I should kill myself?” she said. “A Gordon could never live in shame!”

Every loud ring at the hall door, every unexpected noise, every look of excitement on the faces of those near her, sent a thrill of fear to her heart, blanched her face, and made her hands tremble so that whatever she was holding fell. It seemed to her that her living moments were dying ones. Yet she could not tell what she dreaded. Her husband could not seek her, and it was improbable that any one knew her secret; still the terrible fear never left her, never died away.

That was her first great punishment; the second was her gradual awakening to a sense of what she had done.

It had seemed like a feverish dream to her. She had been led on from hour to hour—from day to day; she had been drawn so insensibly, so gradually, into the net that she had not noticed it. Her senses had been steeped in a glamour of flattery, homage and fancy which she had mistaken for love. The desire for vengeance had hurried her on, the pictured dream of a clever triumph had closed her eyes to all else. It had been a dream, and the awakening was terrible to her.

Looking back calmly, she could not believe that she—Ethel Gordon—had been so blindly misled. Now that it was too late, she asked herself where was her pride, her dignity, her self-respect—where the pride of race and name that should have kept her from so terrible a blunder, so great a folly, so miserable a sin?

Perhaps that was the greatest punishment of all. She would look around her with despairing eyes, asking herself how long she had to live—how long she must carry this terrible burden of sorrow and shame. There was no help for her—no human aid or power could help her. She had taken her vows before Heaven, and only Heaven could release her from them. No wonder she buried her face in her hands, hated the bright sunshine, and longed only for death.

There were long nights when no sleep came to her, when with rapid steps she would walk up and down her room, wringing her hands, uttering from time to time a low, passionate cry, longing with impotent wrath to have Laurie Carrington punished for what he had done to her.

“It was so cruel,” she said—“so bitterly cruel.” To satisfy his selfish love he had blighted the whole of her fair young life. “What had she done,” she asked with weeping eyes, “that Heaven should punish her so cruelly?”

There were whole days when she could do nothing

when she wandered listlessly from room to room, her beautiful face restless with pain, unable to read, to sing, finding only in perpetual movement a solace for her most grievous pain. She knew that time would deaden it, that a day would come when only a dull stupor would tell what she had suffered, but it seemed long in coming.

The friends and neighbors who had known her when her life was all sunshine looked wonderingly at her now, but neither wonder, nor pity, nor compassion, nor sympathy touched Ethel—she was becoming indifferent to all.

There were times, too, when she felt a terrible craving, a desire that she might wake and find it all a dream, that she might wake and find herself Ethel Gordon again—gay, frank, proud, bewitching Ethel—that she might emerge from this dark cloud and sun herself once more in the brightness of life. How she longed for it! But the die was cast, and life was to be no bright dream for her.

She laughed sometimes—a bitter, reckless laugh—when she remembered her father's words—how he had prophesied that if she did not rid herself of her pride and wilful humor a mightier hand would do it for her.

Gradually everything fell into its old routine at Fountayne. Miss Digby more than verified Sir Leonard's predictions. She made an excellent mistress for the Hall; her rule was firm and gentle. She was liked and respected but there was no such passionate attachment as had been expressed for Ethel Gordon.

"I am almost afraid to meet your father, Ethel," said Helen Digby one day. "What will he say to me when he looks at you?"

"Why should he say anything at all?" asked Ethel.

"Oh! my dear, my dear, you are so altered—you are so terribly changed! Oh! Ethel if I could only make you what you used to be—if I could bring back the brightness to your face, the light to your eyes—if I could give you some

of your old defiant frankness, my darling, I would sacrifice all I have in the world ! ”

“ Am I so terribly changed ? ” she inquired, with a slow smile.

Helen Digby raised her hand and pointed to a lilac-tree.

“ There is just as much difference, ” she said, “ between you as I knew you first and you are now, as there is between that tree when it is covered with fragrant flowers and that tree as it stands—without a bloom. ”

Ethel smiled again, the slow sad smile which never brightened the violet eyes. She knew the comparison was correct.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

MORE tahn two years had passed since Ethel Gordon had contracted her fatal marriage vows ; what she had foreseen came true. The smart of her pain, the intolerable anguish, had died away—and given place to a dull stupor, from which she made no effort to arouse herself. By this time she realized what she had done, and knew that as long as life lasted there was no hope, no chance for her ; she would have to bear her burden in secrecy and misery until death released her. She had grown resigned to it with a hopeless, proud, cold kind of resignation ; she suffered proudly, even as she had sinned. Helen Digby had grown accustomed to the change, while the servants had ceased to comment upon it ; and when Sir Leonard returned it struck him with all the force of a terrible blow.

He came home one autumn evening, and his first words were. “ Where is Ethel ? ” She had not hastened to greet him as he thought she would. Conscience had made a coward of her. She was almost afraid he would read her secret in her face—that face of which he had once been so proud.

Slowly and quietly she came to him ; the evening light shone full upon her. It showed him clearly the colorless cheeks, the sad eyes ; and for a few minutes he hardly recognized his darling. She had been wont to walk with such light, buoyant grace—her steps had made music in his ears ; now every movement was sad and slow. Sir Leonard looked at her in dismay.

“ Helen,” he said, “ is this Ethel ? My darling, what have you been doing ? What has happened to you.”

She clung round his neck, her tender arms holding him as though she would never let him go again. She shed a few quiet tears—hopeless, despairing tears ; his presence brought the old happy life back to her so forcibly, the life wherein she had been so free, so happy—wherein she had carried no terrible burden of fear and despair.

Sir Leonard unclasped her arms, and looked earnestly at her.

“ How beautiful you have grown, Ethel ! ” he said. “ But it is the beauty of a sad woman, not a bright young girl.”

She tried to look and speak like her old self.

“ It is your fancy, papa,” she said. “ Why should I be sad—now especially when I have you back ? ”

Sir Leonard said no more just then ; but that evening, after Ethel had left them, he asked Helen Digby to give him five or ten minutes—he wanted to speak to her particularly. He wished to thank her for her constancy, her goodness, her care for his interests, her kindness—to arrange for the time of their marriage ; but, above all, he wished to speak to her of Ethel—to ask what had happened to the child—what ailed her.

“ Believe me, Helen,” he said, slowly, “ that in all my life I have never seen such a change. She was a bright, wilful, laughing girl when I went away, now she looks like one who for long years has carried a terrible burden of sorrow. Helen, I know you will be perfectly frank with me—have you any clue to this mystery—have you any idea of what has changed her ? ”

Helen Digby raised her clear, truthful eyes to his.

“ I have not the least idea in the world,” she answered.

“ Has she had a lover, or anything of that kind ? ”

“ No. You must remember that she has never been a day away from me—not one single day, Leonard. She

could not have had a lover without my knowing it. But I hardly like to say what I think."

"Say anything you please to me, Helen. I know your interest in my darling is as great almost as my own."

"I think, candidly, she detests all notion of love and lovers. She is so unlike other girls, Leonard—she never seems to care for admiration, not even to like it. I do not believe she will ever marry."

"It is strange," said Sir Leonard, musingly.

"But true," she supplemented.

"You say the first beginning of all this was an illness caused by a sunstroke?"

"I think so," replied Miss Digby. "One warm summer day Ethel went out for a long ramble—she was always fond of the woods. When she returned she had a severe fainting fit. She was ill for some days after it, and I do not think she has ever been the same since."

"We must see what change of scene will do for her," said Sir Leonard. "If you will consent, Helen, our wedding trip will be to France and Italy. Ethel will like that, I am sure."

"Will you allow me to advise one thing, Leonard?" asked Helen timidly. "Do not talk to Ethel about herself. She is very proud, very reticent; and I have noticed that any reference to herself gives her pain. She seems to shrink from it. I could not do much for her while you were away; but I should say that plenty of change, cheerful society, and not appearing to notice her depression and melancholy, would be the best cure for both."

"You are very wise, Helen; I quite agree with you. And now, will you think of rewarding my patience? I have waited almost three years."

It was settled that their marriage should take place in September.

“Then,” said Sir Leonard, “we can spend the winter in Italy—and that will do Ethel good.”

The morning following, Sir Leonard saw his daughter walking in the grounds; he joined her there. She was in her favorite spot—the grove of lime-trees.

“I often thought of these lime-trees while I was away,” he said. “Ethel, I am glad to find you here alone; I want to speak to you.”

He saw her shrink with a kind of nervous dread.

“It is not of yourself,” he hastened to add, “unless I stop for one minute to express my great satisfaction. You have grown, Ethel, and you are exceedingly beautiful. I do not want to flatter you, but I do not think among all the Gordons we have had one more fair than you.”

She sighed to herself that this beauty had been but of little use to her—that his pride in it would be but of short duration.

“You will not be surprised to hear that I hope to be married soon,” he continued.

“No,” she said, gently; “I quite expected it.”

“You have grown to like Helen, Ethel, as I thought you would.”

Her colorless face flushed.

“She has been very kind and good to me, papa; I do not think any one could have been kinder.”

“I am glad of it; I knew it would be so. We shall be very happy, Ethel”—and then Sir Leonard paused in sheer wonder.

What had come to her? He remembered certain incidents before he went away: he called to mind her pride, her defiance, her pretty, wilful, imperious ways, her caresses and persuasions. What had made her so meek, so gentle, so submissive?

He was about to say something as to the change, when

he remembered Helen's advice and was silent. After a time he continued,—

“You will be Helen's bride-maid, Ethel? She particularly wishes it?”

She shrank back, pale and shuddering—scared at the very utterance of the words. Then her face flushed crimson, and a strange light came into her eyes.

“Papa, do not think me wanting in respect, but indeed I could not. I have such a nervous dread of weddings that it would make me ill to see one.”

“Why, Ethel, how unlike you are to other girls! I should have thought that of all things a wedding would have pleased you best.”

He laughed and spoke jestingly; but he was startled at the pallor of her face. What could it mean?

“But, papa,” she said, “I am not jesting. You cannot tell how much I dread anything of that kind. It is not girlish nonsense. I am a girl no longer. Sometimes I think I am older than any one who has ever lived—I feel so old.”

“A wedding will make you feel young again,” returned Sir Leonard. “Seriously, Ethel, you must comply with my wish. To do otherwise would be to slight Helen in the eyes of the world, and that I am sure you do not desire.”

“I should be unwilling to do that,” she said, gravely. “If you insist, or if you think it needful, I will comply.”

“Will you tell me, Ethel, why you dislike weddings?” asked Sir Leonard. The words had struck him painfully.

“I think they are very solemn, very grave affairs,” she replied, trying to speak lightly; and her father felt relieved—it was only a girlish, a nervous fancy after all.

The wedding-day came. Helen Digby was married from Lady Stafton's house, and Lady Stafton made the most of a brilliant entertainment. The bride herself looked very fair and comely, the bridegroom manly and gallant;

but every one there talked in low tones of the marvellous beauty, and pale, starry loveliness of the young girl who was Helen's bride-maid—the girl who, while the solemn marriage service was read, drew her white lace shawl round her shoulders and shuddered as if with mortal cold.

They talked in low tones, wondering what it was about the girl that seemed so cold and strange, wondering why the marvellous face never lighted up, nor the beautifully curved lips parted with a smile. Ethel's loveliness and grace created some little excitement among Lady Stafton's guests—the ladies all admired her, the men were quite enthusiastic about her; but, although the most delicate, subtle, graceful flattery was offered to her, and the most exquisite compliments were paid to her, no man could boast of a kind word or a smile from her.

Amidst the splendor of the wedding, the homage that floated around her, the admiration her loveliness excited, Ethel never forgot one thing—that she was the wife of a forger and a thief. The guests might wonder at the grave, proud, collected manner, but no one even suspected the secret that had brought to Ethel death in life

## CHAPTER XXV.

SIR LEONARD and his wife enjoyed the wedding-trip exceedingly. No one knew whether Ethel enjoyed it or not; she was quiet, listless, almost indifferent. But her father, who knew how dearly she loved all art, how greatly she admired everything that was rare and beautiful, thought she must be pleased. He did not know of the dark, terrible curtain that shaded from her everything fair and bright.

They lingered through the winter months in Italy, and then, when the spring came round, they made preparations for returning to England. Lady Gordon expressed a wish to spend a few days in Paris, and Sir Leonard engaged a suite of rooms at the Hotel Bristol.

They were at breakfast there one morning when a large packet of letters arrived from England. Lady Gordon sat smiling at her husband, who was making himself uncomfortable by wondering why French cooks never made good tea. Ethel was absently looking over the columns of a daily paper, when the letters were brought in, and Sir Leonard in haste took them from the waiter's hands.

"More compliments and congratulations," he said. "Why, Helen we have been married some months now, nevertheless our friends are not tired of wishing us joy even yet."

As he spoke he gave Lady Gordon several letters addressed to himself.

"You seem to have no correspondents, Ethel," he remarked—"no letters ever come for you."

"I never write any," she explained.

“That seems strange. Have you no young lady friend whom you care for?”

“The only two friends whom I love are here,” she replied.

Sir Leonard continued,—

“You are so different from other girls, Ethel; I should be better pleased, my dear, to know that you had girlish friends, and cared for them, than to see you indifferent to everything and every one alike.”

Then Sir Leonard opened his letters—Lady Gordon was already deeply engrossed in hers. The baronet read two or three and laid them down. There was a large one with a Government seal, and Sir Leonard’s face flushed with pleasure as he read it.

“That is very gratifying,” he said; “the result of my mission to Vienna has been so excellent that I am offered an excellent Government appointment—it will oblige me to remain in London during the Parliamentary season, though.”

“I am delighted to hear it,” responded Lady Gordon; “I am proud that your merit and talent are appreciated.”

“And you Ethel,” asked Sir Leonard, “have you nothing to say to me?”

She clasped her arms in her old girlish fashion round his neck and laid her beautiful face close to his.

“I am proud of you, papa,” she said; and then her heart grew cold with the thought of what he—to whom honor was so justly paid—would say if he knew that she was the wife of a felon.

Sir Leonard laughed a low, happy laugh, that did his wife’s heart good to hear.

“I shall have the fairest, kindest wife, and the most beautiful daughter in London,” he remarked. “Ethel, you will have to look more kindly upon lovers there.”

She shrank back as though his words had stabbed her.



"I will not have lovers," she said. "Oh, papa, never speak to me of such!"

He laughed again, thinking that a woman so royally beautiful must hear of love and lovers, whether she liked it or not. Then he returned to his letters. The next was one with a deep black border, and as he read, the smile died from Sir Leonard's face, and pained, half-bewildered surprise came instead.

"Ethel—Helen," he cried, "here is strange news—so strange!"

Lady Gordon put down her cup, and looked at her husband.

"What is it Leonard?" she asked briefly.

"I cannot believe that it is true," he said; "it seems incredible. Tell me Helen, am I dreaming or waking?"

"Waking, Leonard. What has surprised you so much?"

"Listen, Ethel—listen, Helen, sweet wife, Lord St. Norman is dead. He was my cousin, once removed. He is dead, and I am his heir. I am Lord St. Norman, now. Tell me, am I dreaming, or awake?"

"Awake, most certainly," replied his wife. "How has your good fortune come about, Leonard?"

"Unexpectedly, and somewhat incomprehensibly; for Lord St. Norman was quite a young man. I knew that I was his next of kin, but I never even thought of being his heir. I expected he would marry and have children of his own. He was quite young, and was engaged to marry Lady Mary Semour."

There was silence for some minutes, and then Ethel, looking at her father, asked,—

"Are you pleased, papa?"

"I hardly know, my dear—I suppose I am. I shall be a very rich man. I am not sure, but I think I like my own name of Gordon best, Helen. You will be a great lady

now, my dear. You will be Lady St. Norman, of Norman's Keep, in Devonshire ; Yarnold Abbey, in Yorkshire ; Rosse, in Scotland ;—and mistress of a large mansion—Brookdale House—in London, as well as of a pretty villa in the Isle of Wight. Do you not feel much elated, my dear ? ”

“ No,” she replied, simply. “ I was always proud of being your wife, Leonard. Nothing could add to that honor.”

Which little speech so delighted Lord St. Norman that he rose from his seat and kissed Helen's fair, comely face, and then he looked at Ethel.

“ This makes a great difference in your prospects, Ethel ; it will make you one of the richest heiresses in England. You must prepare for a regular siege.”

“ Why must it make me a great heiress, papa ? ” she asked quietly.

“ Because, my dear, I shall be able to leave you a very large fortune—one that will surprise you. For your sake I am very well pleased, Ethel.”

For her sake—she smiled bitterly to herself. What difference could it make to her, the forger's wife's ? A large fortune could do nothing for her. All the money that was ever coined could not help her. She had flung away every hope in life to become the wife of a convicted felon.

“ Ethel,” cried her father, “ do not look sad, You must help me to write some letters. And, Helen, will you see that all preparations are made for our return ? We must go to Norman's Keep—at least, I must. You had better follow in a few days, after the funeral is over.”

“ Papa,” said Ethel, turning to him suddenly, “ are you surprised ? ”

“ In some measure, of course. I knew that I was the late lord's heir-at-law ; but, as he was young, and was engaged to be married, I really never thought there was any

probability of my succession. Seriously speaking, it is a very excellent thing for you, Ethel. With your beauty and fortune you may attain one of the highest positions in England. I am hopeful for you."

She turned away, sick at heart. Not by one word would she damp the ardor of his hopes or show him how futile they were; not by one word would she hint to him that plans and hopes were all vain for her. She was already the wife of a forger and a thief.

When Lord St. Norman had quitted the room, Helen went up to Ethel, and raising the beautiful face with her hands, looked long and wistfully at it.

"Ethel, my dear," she said, "you have kept your own counsel. Something has happened in your life—I know not what—which has changed you from a gay, bright girl into a sad, unhappy woman. I see it now, and have guessed it for some time past. I am not seeking to learn your secret, Ethel; but, my dear child, this much I do ask you: could you not, for your father's sake, lay aside this depression, and be more like other girls—for his sake, dear,—to give him pleasure?"

"Am I not like other girls?" she asked.

"No, you are quite different from all others," replied Lady St. Norman.

"Then, to please you, Helen, and to please my father, I will really strive to copy them. I can promise no more."

But with that Helen was almost content, knowing that what Ethel said she would do,

## CHAPTER XXVI.

A BRIGHT, beautiful May day. In Brookdale House every one seemed to be unusually busy and excited, for to-day Lady St. Norman and Miss St. Norman were to be introduced to her most gracious Majesty. Lady St. Norman, usually so calm, so gentle, so placid, owned that she was agitated.

She was surprised that Ethel did not manifest more interest. Lord St. Norman's daughter seemed to think but little of the great event which gave her stepmother so much pleasure. If her father had not insisted, she would not have agreed to go at all.

"It was all very well for others," said Ethel to herself—"for girls who had a happy future, a bright, pleasant life before them—but, for her, there seemed something incongruous about it."

The wife of a forger and a thief to be received at Court! She smiled bitterly to herself as she thought of it. Instead of going to Court or mingling with the gay and happy, the poor child would fain have hidden herself, her sorrow and despair, from all mortal eyes. In vain she had begged her father to leave her at Norman's Keep, to let her stay at Fountayne, to place her anywhere, rather than ask her to take her position in the great world.

"Of what use is it?" she asked herself. "Other girls have some hope—the hope of love, of marriage, of happiness, of pleasure; I have none."

The very word "love" was distasteful to her. What had love done for her but plunge her into such a dark gulf of misery as she could not be rescued from?

Lord and Lady St. Norman both wondered why Ethel

shrank from the society of young girls of her own age. She seemed to avoid and dread them. Their pretty innocent conversation, their ideas of love and lovers, were all full of pain to her; their girlish laughter seemed to hurt her, their freedom from care was to her like a reproach.

"I shall never be as they are," she was wont to say to herself; "there will be no more laughter or song, no more pleasure or brightness for me."

Lord St. Norman had taken possession of his new estates; he had attended the funeral of the late lord, had administered to his will, arranged all his affairs, and had decided that Norman's Keep should be the principal place of abode of himself and his family. He had been warmly welcomed by the tenantry, with whom the late lord had not been a favorite—young and thoughtless, he had not looked after their interests or attended to their wants.

The new lord promised to be very different, and he was welcomed accordingly. People were all anxious to make his acquaintance. As Sir Leonard Gordon, he had been well known in diplomatic circles, but not beyond them—now, with his new title, every one felt an interest in him.

It was known that he had only one daughter, and much wonder was afloat about her. Some had known beautiful Ethel Gordon when she lived in the quiet retirement of Fountayne—when she had been content with county society. But Lord St. Norman's heiress was a very different person. In the great world people were all desirous of welcoming her.

The family had gone to London, and had taken possession of Brookdale House. Both ladies were to be presented on the same day, the only difference being that one looked forward to the event with the keenest pleasure, the other with the keenest pain. Lady St. Norman was pleased with her court costume—she was delighted with the grand old family diamonds; while Ethel stood in all the grandeur

of her beauty before the large mirror, and never even remarked the color of the dress she was wearing.

“Of what use is it all?” was the burden of her thoughts. “Of what use?”

Lord St. Norman had purchased an exquisite suite of pearls and rubies for her; he intended them as a surprise on the day of her presentation—and a delightful surprise they were. He gave them to her himself.

“That is the greatest pleasure I have had since I have been a rich man,” he said. “I always longed to be able to give you bright and beautiful jewels, Ethel, you are so beautiful yourself. Now my longing has been gratified.”

She opened the cases. The time had been when her face would have flushed with pleasure and her eyes have gleamed with delight at the sight of those gorgeous jewels. Now, as she looked at them, her face grew pale, her eyes dim with tears.

“They are too good, too costly for me, papa,” she said. Lord St. Norman smiled.

“Why, Ethel, you are growing humble!” he exclaimed. “Too good for you! In my opinion there is no jewel too costly for you, my darling.”

She held up her hand with a little gesture of infinite pain, but she uttered no word; she could not explain to him—the proud, indulgent father, who valued his riches only because they ministered to her pleasure—that jewels did not befit her. She was the wife of a forger and a thief.

“Take them, my darling,” he requested, “and be happy; I would give all I have in the world, Ethel, to see a brighter look on your face.”

She kissed him and thanked him, trying to hide her despair behind a smiling countenance, and on the day of her presentation at Court she wore them.

Lord St. Norman had always been proud of his daughter—he had always rejoiced in her glorious beauty;

but on this day he was prouder than ever. The court costume suited her regal style of beauty ; her very indifference to her own loveliness seemed to increase it ; and at Court she created a sensation rarely equalled.

The day following, every one was in raptures concerning her ; the fashionable papers, which gave a full description of her costume, spoke of her marvellous beauty ; men at their clubs, ladies in their drawing-rooms, discussed her. She woke one morning to find herself famous, to find her name on every lip, to find men eloquent in her praise.

Invitations poured in upon her ; the beautiful Miss St. Norman was worshipped like a queen. She received all homage with indifference.

Lord St. Norman was delighted with his daughter's success. On the morning after the Drawing-room, as they sat together at breakfast, he complimented her.

“ You have all the world at your feet, Ethel,” he said.

But Helen, looking into the face of the girl she had grown to love so dearly, thought to herself that even the homage of the whole world would bring no happiness to Ethel.

“ The Duchess of Listborough, Lady Bramfield—how many more invitations have you ? ” asked her father, looking over the cards. “ Why, Ethel, if the days were forty-eight, instead of twenty-four hours long, you could not accept all these ? ”

To his surprise she seemed neither elated nor flattered. He could not understand her. It seemed most unnatural that she should be so completely indifferent to the admiration of the fashionable world. That same day Lord St. Norman said to his wife.

“ Helen, I cannot imagine why Ethel differs so greatly from other girls. I think I should prefer her as she was, with all her faults, her pride, her love of power—the Ethel

of old, who was always capricious, always charming, to the Ethel who has grown patient, submissive, and indifferent."

Helen sighed deeply.

"She was happier then, Leonard ; but I cannot see why she should be so unhappy now."

They talked of her, wondered about her, and lamented the change in her, but they said little to her. She had shown them plainly how much she disliked all allusion to herself.

Before long, Ethel St. Norman found herself queen of the most brilliant society in London. She was more sought after, more admired, than any other woman in England, and her chief charm was that she seemed so utterly unconscious of her beauty. No homage, no admiration, no flattery, brought a flush to her face, a light to her eyes. Her superb indifference, her calm, proud serenity, her cool reception of all attention, had a piquancy all their own.

Girls who blushed, smiled, talked—were pleased with pretty attentions, were common enough ; this grand young beauty, who would have received the homage of kings as coolly as she did that of her peers, was to say the least of it, uncommon. Men strove to win a smile from the perfect lips, and failed ; they exerted talent, intellect, wit, all to win from her one kind look, and failed. She was among them, but not of them ; she seemed like one apart from all others. Some of the noblest and most distinguished men in England sought to win the favor of the proud, peerless girl, and did not succeed. The colder she appeared, the greater was their admiration ; the more devoted they became, the prouder and the calmer she seemed.

If she had given smile for smile—if she had seemed proud from the admiration lavished upon her—if she had sought in the least degree to attract—it might have been different. As it was, no man could boast of one mark of favor—no man could flatter himself that Ethel St. Norman



cared for him. It was debated whether mere animation or a dash of coquetry would improve her. The decision always was that she could not be more winning than she was in her calm, cool pride—that she could not be more charming than she was in her proud, serene indifference.

She had numberless admirers, and would have had many lovers, but that she shrank with pain from all such. No man had the courage to make love to her. They called her Snow Queen, but she never even smiled when she heard the name. She knew why she could never sun herself in the warm light of kindness or even of love—she knew why no man must win a smile from her lips or bring a sparkle into her beautiful eyes.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

LORD ST. NORMAN was growing reconciled to the fact that his daughter would never be her own bright self again.

“I have heard of people,” he said one day to his wife, “whose features and appearance generally have undergone a change, but I have never seen any one whose heart and soul have altered as Ethel’s have. She has not one gleam of the old, pretty, wilful, defiant pride about her; she used to be all sunshine, all gayety. I can remember that at times I felt frightened lest she should never grow sedate or womanly.”

“She has never been the same since that illness at St. Ina’s,” observed Helen, with a sigh; “at times I wish we had never gone there.”

“It was a strange affair, Helen, that capture of the bank-forgery. It must have distressed you. Did Ethel seem to think much about it?”

“No; she was taken ill on the same day. She did not show any interest in the matter. So I did not often mention it.”

Lord St. Norman and his wife were sitting in Helen’s pretty morning-room at Brookdale House. While they were speaking Ethel entered. Her father looked at her with a smile.

“Speak of an angel,” he said, “and you hear the rustle of wings. We were just speaking of you, Ethel.”

She seemed to shrink with such sensitive pain from all mention to herself, that Helen was not surprised to see her go up to Lord St. Norman, and, placing one hand on his shoulder say,—

“Do not talk about me, papa—it grieves me when you do.”

“My dearest Ethel,” said her father, kissing the white hand that lay on his shoulder, “how strange you are! I shall never understand you. What can give me greater pleasure than to speak of you?”

The beautiful face grew so sad and wistful that Helen hastened to interfere.

“We were speaking of that affair at St. Ina’s, Ethel—you remember it, I suppose?—the capture of that unfortunate Mr. Nugent.”

Her face grew white, and the shadow of a deadly fear darkened her eyes; her lips sprang apart with a faint murmur that died away upon them; and then the need for arousing herself occurred to her.

“I remember it,” she said, slowly.

“What a terrible shock it was to us all!” continued Helen, “The unhappy man had made Lady Stafton believe that he was a friend of Lady Delamaine’s—we saw him two or three times a day.”

Ethel spoke no word. Lord St. Norman was silent for a few minutes and then he said,—

“Did you like him, Helen?”

“He was well-bred, agreeable, and pleasant,” she replied. “I liked him very well. I should never have guessed he was a criminal.”

“I remember thinking the story a very sad one,” remarked Lord St. Norman. “A similar occurrence happened in Vienna, but the man there was married; he left his wife and children on the world when he went to prison.”

“Mr. Nugent was not married,” said Lady St. Norman, “although he puzzled us all by speaking of his wife. He must have been wandering in his mind.”

“Did you like him, Ethel?” asked Lord St. Norman, wondering again at the strange silence of his daughter.

“No,” she replied, with a grave sadness in her face and voice; “I did not like him.”

Helen turned quickly to her.

“Did you not like him? O, Ethel! how anxious and nervous I used to be over you! Do you remember that I warned you against him?”

She remembered it so well that she could have cried aloud in her anguish and sorrow.

Lord St. Norman smiled.

“I think your zeal outran your discretion there, Helen—Ethel, who is too proud to smile upon the most eligible men in London, would not waste a look, I should imagine, upon one who was not eligible.”

He stopped suddenly, for the beautiful colorless face wore such an expression of pain that he was startled by it; he remembered what his wife had said, that nothing ever distressed Ethel so greatly as talking to her about herself. Thinking to distract her thoughts, he asked,—

“Why did you not like him, Ethel—this unfortunate man?”

She was silent for some seconds, and then she replied,—

“I liked him at first, papa, but afterward I fancied that he was not true—that there was something insincere about him.”

Even as she spoke she seemed to hear Laurie Carrington's voice with its tone of passionate devotion—“I love you so—I love you so dearly, my beautiful queen.” He might have been false in everything else, but he was true in this, his great, deep, passionate love for her. Forger, thief, criminal, reckless gambler, dishonorable man he might be, yet he loved her with truth, depth, and purity, and she knew it.

She had answered all the questions Lord St. Norman asked, but the effort to control herself had been great—her limbs trembled, her hands shook.

"I must leave them," she thought to herself, "or they will discover my secret."

That was her one dread—the dread that haunted her by night and by day, that stood like a grim, gaunt skeleton by her side, that darkened the last lingering brightness from her life.

"How do people live," the unhappy girl would ask herself, "year after year, with a secret like mine? How do they bear the dread, the suspense, the constant haunting fear? But I would rather die any death than that my terrible secret should be known."

There were times when she could hardly realize her position—when it seemed to her that she must have been in some long, terrible dream. She was only eighteen, young and beautiful, a wealthy heiress, one of the most admired beauties of the day, the daughter of one of the noble peers of England, and yet she had been privately married to a felon. She wrung her hands in silent dismay as she thought of it and a great dread cloud of hopelessness came over her. Of what use was her life? She could not enjoy it. Of what use were all these richest gifts of Providence? She was bound in heaviest chains, and nothing could free her. She often wondered if the law could free her. She was married to a man with a false name, and she would have given much to know whether that made her marriage illegal; but she never dared to ask the question—it seemed to her that, if she did so, every one would at once suspect. Even if the law could free her, she dared not apply to it; she could not make that wretched story known. Married at eighteen, in secrecy and haste—married less for love than from desire of revenge—who would believe her? Who would ever look kindly at her again? She could not bring such unutterable shame and disgrace on her proud, indulgent father; there was no resource but to bear her lot with as much patience as she could.

“After all,” she would say to herself, “it is my own fault; I was so proud, so wilful, so defiant. I thought of nothing but revenge on the woman whose kindness and gentleness have never yet failed me. It is my own fault—but surely no sin was ever so terribly punished. People have committed crimes a thousand times greater than mine, yet have not been punished one-half so hardly.”

Even to herself she never excused herself. “It was all my own fault,” she would repeat. “I have no one to blame but myself.”

She looked sometimes in the papers, in the vain, vague hope that there might be some news of her husband—that she might discover where he was undergoing his punishment—that she might know whether he was living or dead. Perhaps one of the hardest trials she had to bear was that a veil of oblivion had fallen over him. Since she parted with him at the gate leading to the wood at St. Ina’s she had heard no word from him—since he covered her face and her hands with parting, passionate kisses, she had never seen him. If she could have heard that he was living, it would have been some relief from the terrible anxiety that weighed upon her. The oblivion that seemed to have fallen over him, and over everything connected with him, had its own terrors for her.

Looking back, she could not imagine how she had mistaken her feeling of liking for love. That was the greatest mystery to her—how could she ever, even in her wildest moments, have even fancied that slight liking to be love?

“I was a foolish, ignorant girl,” she would say to herself. “But, ah, me! how terribly I am punished for my sins.”

If she could have forgotten her trouble for one half hour, it would have been the greatest relief to her; but in her dreams by night and her thoughts by day, it was ever present. No matter how bright the scenes in which she

moved, no matter how great the magnificence that surrounded her, the one thought was ever in her mind,—

“I have no right to be here—I have no right to be here—I have no place here—for I am the wife of a felon.”

The beautiful face had not lost its exquisite loveliness—the sorrow that always seemed to cloud it softened it; the proud, serene calm that never changed into brightness, suited the noble features. Those who saw Ethel could never forget her; from a crowd of a thousand faces, hers, with its ideal brow, its violet eyes, and sad, sweet mouth, stood out quite clear and distinct. That first season one of the most eminent artists in London asked permission to paint her portrait. Lord St. Norman was quite willing, but she objected. In vain her father tried to discover why; how little he thought that this proud, peerless daughter of his dreaded lest people, looking at her pictured face, should say, in after years: “I saw her portrait once; she was the wife of a dishonorable man—a common forger!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THAT same season a new star appeared on the fashionable horizon. The young Duke of Southmead, who had been abroad since he attained his majority, returned to England, and became the "observed of all observers." There was no fair gift of earth's that had not been lavished upon him ; he was young, rich, and handsome, not more than twenty-five years of age, and it was generally believed that he was one of the wealthiest men in England. He was the fortunate possessor of three magnificent estates in England—Burlinghame Abbey, Lanville Court, and Glaston Hall ; Glenalan Towers and Heatherbrae in Scotland also belonged to him ; and he had an accumulation of money in funds, which would have made any ordinary man rich. To add to his unbounded wealth, coal had been discovered on one of his English estates, which had more than trebled its value.

The Duke of Southmead was a handsome man ; he had a fair frank Saxon face, laughing blue eyes, a head covered with fair clustering hair, and a beautiful mouth. His figure was tall ; he had broad shoulders, a dignified, easy carriage, a charm of grace and manner which alone would have made him popular. His Grace of Southmead was clever, too ; he was blessed with a clear intellect, sound common sense, and good judgment ; he was eloquent of speech, with a flow of original thoughts expressed in elegant language. He was a truthful, honorable English gentleman, than which no higher praise could be given to him.

It was well known that the Duke of Southmead was



looking for a wife ; he had been heard more than once to say that the only gift wanting to him was that of a fair and loving wife.

When the fact became known Belgravian mothers looked hopeful. Who could wish for any daughter a fairer lot in life than to be Duchess of Southmead ? Money, jewels, magnificence of every kind would be her portion.

She the fortunate one would be envied by all other women. No man was more popular than this young duke ; it was not altogether because of his vast wealth—the handsome face and graceful, chivalrous manner had something to do with it. Ladies declared that no man had a more beautiful smile.

Fair young *debutantes* were almost timid in his presence, for they had been told what a great prize was to be won in the matrimonial market. Anxious mothers had suggested that they should wear blue. His grace had been heard to say that blue was his favorite color. They had been told to spare no pains over their singing, for his grace was fond of music.

When he entered a room there was a thrill of excitement. His taste was really good, and he was a passionate admirer of beauty. Happy the girl whom he honored with his attentions—she was looked upon with something like envy by her companions. But the young duke was very cautious—he never went beyond the merest admiration. He had seen the loveliest women in Europe, but he had not fallen in love with any one of them. He had enjoyed many flirtations—he had been like a butterfly, roaming from flower to flower ; but he had not seen the woman whom he cared to make Duchess of Southmead.

At Lady Crane's fancy ball he met Ethel St. Norman, and for the first time fell deeply in love. Her beautiful face, with its proud, sad, sweet mouth, and dreamy, lovely eyes, charmed him ; still more, he was irresistibly captivated

by her manner. Fair faces, as a rule, smiled upon him, and bright eyes grew brighter for his coming. He was accustomed to see young girls look flattered by his notice, while others seemed anxious to attract it; but he was accustomed to homage and deference—but at Ethel's hands he met simply with indifference.

She was standing alone when he first saw her, and he thought her attitude one of marvellous grace. She had implored Lord St. Norman to allow her to refuse this invitation, but he would not hear of it.

“You have been to a great variety of entertainments, Ethel,” he said, “but you have never been to a fancy ball. You must go my dear. I hear that the Prince and Princess of Holstadt and the young Duke of Southmead are to be present.

She turned away, sick at heart. Her place was not with princes—she who had married in such secrecy and such haste—she who was the wife of a felon. Lord St. Norman had insisted that she should choose some fancy costume. He had suggested many—those of queens, heroines, and beauties—but she would wear none of them.

It was Helen who, with her quick instinct, saw that Ethel shrank from display.

“Go as ‘Night,’” she suggested, “that will require only a plain dress of silver and black,” to which Ethel consented.

But when she saw herself in the tall mirror, she thought that no costume could have heightened her loveliness more marvellously; and Lord St. Norman smiled as he thought how well his wife had chosen.

The dress of black net was dotted with silver stars—the dark, dusky folds fell in the most artistic fashion. Ethel's rich brown hair lay in clustering masses on her white, graceful neck; it was wreathed with small silver stars. The beautiful face seemed to rise from the dark

dress like some lovely flower from its stem ; the white neck, the rounded arms and beautiful shoulders had never looked more fair than they did now, shining from the cloud of black. Lord St. Norman smiled when he saw her.

“ If you did not wish to attract notice, Ethel ” he said, “ you should have chosen a different costume. ” To himself he added that, let her have chosen what she might, she would still be more beautiful than any one else.

The splendor of the scene that soon afterward met her eyes might have delighted her if she could for one moment have forgotten her terrible secret, her terrible care. It went with her, and, while the noblest and greatest in the land bowed before her, it shadowed her, this secret that was slowly and surely eating her heart away.

Lady Crane's rooms were filled with a most brilliant crowd. The *elite* of the fashionable world were present. There was a most beautiful variety of costumes—those of kings, queens, fairies, friars, peasants, heroines of story and of song—but all paled before that of the girl who had chosen to appear as “ Night. ”

She was soon surrounded ; that lovely face of hers had a terrible influence over men. There was heart-burning and jealousy. More than one present would have given much for one smile from her lips.

She danced first with Prince Holstadt. When he had left her she stood for some minutes talking to Helen ; and it was then the Duke of Southmead saw her. She was standing by the scarlet blossoms of one of the rare plants with which the ballroom was half filled, her dark dress, with its silver stars, falling in graceful folds around her tall, graceful figure. Her lovely face was bent over the scarlet flowers. He looked at her in wonder, and as he looked at her his heart went out to her.

He was not accustomed to wait when he wished for anything, and he said to himself that he must gain an in-

roduction to the beautiful girl, that the sweet eyes must smile on him, the fair face brighten for him. He went at once to Lady Crane.

“Who is that tall, beautiful girl with the sad, sweet face?” he asked.

Lady Crane looked up with a smile.

“There are so many tall, beautiful girls,” she replied, laughingly. “Which one does your grace mean?”

“I see none like her standing there. Do you see, Lady Crane, she is near the crimson bank of flowers? Her dress is dark, with silver stars.”

Lady Crane looked in the direction indicated, and then she smiled.

“Is it possible,” she asked, “that you do not know Miss St. Norman? I should have imagined every one in London knew her. She is the beauty of the season.”

“I have heard of her,” said the young Duke, slowly; “but I never imagined she was one half so lovely. Will you introduce me, Lady Crane?”

Ethel hardly raised her eyes when—the observed of all observers—the young duke stood before her. He was piqued by her indifference, and vowed to himself that it should all be dispelled before the warmth of his love as a mist by the heat of the sun. As she walked away, leaving them together, Lady Crane said to herself,—

“That would be a most suitable match; he is the handsomest man and she is the loveliest girl in London. I should always have the credit of having brought it about.”

More than one in the ballroom thought as did Lady Crane—that his Grace of Southmead and the proud, calm, beautiful Ethel St. Norman were perfectly matched.

No such idea occurred to Ethel herself. She gave no sign of being pleased because the young duke was evidently delighted with her; on the contrary, as he paid her compliment, after compliment, she said to herself,—

“What would he think of me if he knew that I was the wife of a convicted forger?”

He asked her to dance, but she declined, so surprising him in a manner that he had never before experienced. To refuse to dance with him for whom other young ladies would gladly have given up their favorite partners! That refusal increased his liking for her a thousand-fold. If she had appeared, like others, flattered by his attentions, pleased to secure his notice, he would, in all probability, have thought no more of her; but the beautiful face was never turned to his, the lovely eyes were only once raised, and then the white lids drooped over them, and their bright depths were veiled from him. He was piqued and resolute.

“Haughty, proud, and beautiful, she shall love me yet,” he said to himself; and he devoted himself almost exclusively to her.

Mothers and chaperons looked at him in despair, as though they would have said, “There is no more hope—she has taken him captive.”

Then men looked on in utter wonder. It was strange to see the young duke in earnest at last. That he was in earnest was plainly to be seen. The dreamy, beautiful music of a German waltz floated round.

“You will not refuse me, Miss St. Norman?” he said. “The music is so beautiful, one feels compelled to dance.”

She never looked at him, but the hands that were touching the scarlet flowers trembled slightly. She did refuse again, and again a feeling of surprise took possession of him.

“Do you not like dancing, Miss St. Norman?” he asked.

Yes—she liked it, but just then she did not feel inclined for it.

This was something new for his grace, who had always

hitherto found that the inclinations of young ladies led them to dance with him.

“Will you allow me to talk to you, then,” he begged, “if you prefer not to dance?”

“If it pleases you,” she replied, indifferently.

But she did not make room for him by her side, as many would have done, and try to please him. He stood before her deferentially, as though she were a queen. He devoted himself to her. But, when the evening had ended and he was trying to buoy himself up with some little hope of success, he could not remember one smile, one kind word, one glance from the beautiful eyes; he had not one single favor on which to rest his hopes.

Having waited patiently a whole hour for the purpose, he escorted Ethel to her carriage. He had not won one favor from her, but as he bade her good-night, his eyes fell on the flowers she carried.

“Miss St. Norman,” he said, “will you give me those flowers?”

Then she raised her eyes to his face, slowly, proudly, coldly.

“My flowers?” she returned. “Why should you care for them? They are dead.”

“Living or dead, I care not,” he said. “In my humble opinion they will not die after having been in your hands all the evening; that ought to make them live.”

“I have never heard of immortality conferred upon flowers,” she observed.

The implied compliment, he saw plainly, was lost upon her, and he liked her still more from her want of vanity.

“Give me only one from your bouquet,” he said earnestly “I will ask no more.”

“Why do you desire it?” inquired Ethel.

“Because it is yours,” he replied with passion, “and because you have held it. Give it to me to remind me of

to-night. I shall always hold my truest and best life as having begun from to-night."

She glanced at him, saw the light on his face, heard the deep, earnest music of his voice, and understood him.

"Will you grant my prayer?" he pursued. "Will you give me one flower, Miss St. Norman?"

"Not one," she declined, gravely.

There came into her heart something like hatred of love and lovers—of men, because a man had so cruelly betrayed her. A passionate indignation against the whole race seized her. The young duke's face fell as he heard her words.

"You are very unkind to me, Miss St. Norman," he said.

"It is not in my power to be kind or unkind to your grace," she rejoined, haughtily.

It was a new experience to the Duke of Southmead; in all his life no one had denied him a favor or refused to comply with one of his requests. He felt a singular respect for the fearless young girl who now did so.

As Lord St. Norman and his wife and his daughter drove home, Ethel thought of the duke.

"Surely he is not going to pretend that he loves me," she said to herself. "If he knew—if he knew all—instead of loving, he would hate me."

When they reached home, Lady St. Norman was struck with the girl's white face.

"You are tired, Ethel," she said. "Will you come into my boudoir? We will have a cup of coffee there. I do not like to see you looking so tired. Leonard will you join us?"

Lord St. Norman professed himself "only too delighted;" and Helen, whose special gift seemed to be the power of making every one comfortable, made Ethel rest on a couch while she found the cosiest chair for her husband.

"Now let us talk over the ball," she said; "I always think that that is the pleasantest thing about an entertainment—talking of it afterward. What did you think of the costumes, Leonard?"

"I admired them all," he replied, and then he inquired, "Helen, did you see Sir Oscar Charlcote? With all due deference to all fair ladies, I considered him the most interesting character present."

"Why?" asked Helen, briefly.

"Because of his great personal bravery—he is literally as brave as a lion. Did you never hear of him, Helen, nor you, Ethel?"

No, they had not heard of him; so Lord St. Norman continued,—

"I have longed to see him for years. Now that my desire has been gratified, I find him to be what he has been represented—as brave as a lion, yet as gentle as a child; fearless, yet most modest; free from the least taint of vanity, frank, kind—ah! well, I need not dwell upon his character. I am difficult to please, but Oscar Charlcote is my true ideal of a real hero. I can tell you one story of him."

Ethel raised her eyes to her father's face, and he saw that she looked interested.

"There were two brothers—Sir Ralph Charlcote and his younger brother, Oscar. They were both in the army. Sir Ralph was major, and Oscar an ensign. They were in the same regiment, and that regiment was serving in India. Sir Ralph was many years older than his brother. He was married, and had his wife and three children with him. I knew Lady Charlcote—she was a tender-hearted, loving gentlewoman, with a fair, high-bred face and a graceful manner. Sir Ralph held some important military post in the hills, and when a rebellion broke out among one of the tribes whom he had to hold in check, he, with his wife, and



three young children, occupied a large stone residence that had been erected for one of the native rulers. His brother Oscar rode over one day to consult with him on the aspect of affairs, and that very day the Charlcotes' place was surrounded, and its inhabitants all taken by surprise. They resisted for a time, but resistance was quite useless—their enemies were a hundred to one against them. Still, they fought for some hours. At last the natives forced an entrance into the house. The English servants were tortured and killed; Sir Ralph, his wife—poor, gentle Lady Charl-cote—their little children, and Oscar were brought out into the courtyard—there to suffer a thousand deaths in one. The two hapless officers were bound fast in chairs, and the unhappy father was compelled to look on while his children were barbarously slaughtered. I will not tell you the details of Lady Charl-cote's fate. When Sir Ralph could bear it no longer, he turned to his brother with a loud despairing cry,—

“Oscar, Oscar, what shall I do?”

“Set your teeth and die hard,” the young ensign replied—words that became a proverb in his regiment. Even as they were spoken, a detachment of men came to their rescue. It was too late to save the unhappy lady, the little children, or even Sir Ralph; but Oscar was rescued. His health failed him, and, sorely against his will, he was compelled to leave the army. He became Sir Oscar Charl-cote of Weston Royal. I never see suffering in any shape, but I think of his words—‘Set your teeth and die hard.’”

As she listened, a strange light came over Ethel's beautiful face. She took the words home to her heart and pondered them. If a man could do that for the endurance of physical pain, surely she, who had suffered almost the extremity of mental anguish, could do the same.

“And I will do it,” she said to herself, with proud resolve. “No murmur against my lot shall escape my lips—no

words of regret, I will do as the young soldier advised—set my teeth and die hard.”

From that day a change came over Ethel. There was no murmuring, no more despair. She began to look her life in the face. She had blighted and ruined it at the very outset; but of what remained she would make the best. She would “die hard;” she would bear her pain and her sorrow in such a way that they would be hidden from all human eyes; she would endure without repining; that which a man could do in the extremity of physical pain she might do in the extreme of mental anguish. The young soldier’s words and the lesson they inculcated took hold of her; in great measure they renewed and reinvigorated the heart and mind fast sinking into despair. They were always present to her; when her heart was sinking, her courage failing, her pride yielding, and she felt ready to die in her sorrow, they raised and reanimated her—they seemed to become part of herself. It was only natural, under the circumstances, that she should wonder what he was like—that her mind should dwell in some measure upon him.

The beauty and grandeur of endurance and courage seemed to grow clearer. All people sinned—some in reckless wickedness, others, like herself, through the ignorance of youth, but every one had not the fortitude and patience to endure the punishment of their sin.

A new expression seemed to come to the beautiful face—one of high and noble resolve, and of brave, bright endurance. Ethel seemed to recover some of the high spirits and animation that had once distinguished her, and Lord St. Norman was delighted with the change. He thought she would in time be her own self again. He little dreamed that the improvement, slight as it was, was caused by the brave resolve to bear in patience the blight and ruin of her life.

In the meanwhile, to his own intense surprise, the young

Duke of Southmead found himself, for the first time in his life, deeply in love. He soon became like a shadow of the beautiful Miss St. Norman. He went wherever she went. If Ethel rode or drove, she was sure to meet him ; if she went to a dinner, ball, *soiree*, no matter what, he was sure to be among the company present.

Belgravian mothers and chaperons had grown accustomed to the turn which matters had taken ; they had given up all hopes of the great prize—Miss St. Norman had won it. And it was not to be wondered at that she had won it, for she was one of the wealthiest and loveliest girls of the season. It was first whispered, and then rumor grew bolder and spoke aloud, that the Duke of Southmead had fallen in love with the beautiful Miss St. Norman. Every one pronounced it a most suitable and excellent match. Both had beauty, both had high birth, both were possessed of great wealth. So the world agreed that it was a most excellent match, fitting in every way, and that nothing could be better.

For some time Ethel found herself obliged to be patient. She could not refuse the young duke before he had made her an offer ; she could not speak to him on the subject before he had spoken to her. But she did what lay in her power. He could not boast of word, or look, or smile that was kinder than what she gave to others. She treated him with indifference ; she received him with the coolest nonchalance. But the colder her indifference, the deeper grew his love.

She began to feel sorry for him. He might have his little faults of vanity and conceit. Placed as he was, it was not to be wondered at. He had known nothing but flattery. He might be vain, but there was no doubt of one thing—he loved her with all the strength of his soul. She began to pity him, knowing that, even had no impediment existed she could never have loved him. She felt sorry that he,

should have concentrated all his hopes on her. He was not the kind of man she could make a hero of; even his style of beauty was not a style she admired.

He would not take any of the very plain hints that she gave him—he put them aside—he would not believe but that he should win her eventually. So, for some time he became her shadow—he sunned himself in the light of her most fair and gracious presence, believing that his hopes must be realized at last.

One morning Lord St Norman seemed unusually pleased with a letter that he had received. He read it several times with a peculiarly bright and happy smile; and then, looking at his daughter, he said,—

“Ethel, I should like to speak to you. This letter concerns you. Will you come into my study after breakfast?”

Neither interest nor wonder was excited within her at her father’s words—no letter could contain news of paramount importance to her.

After a short interval she followed Lord St. Norman into his study, and there she found her father standing by the table, smiling again at the letter he held in his hand.

“Ethel,” he said, “sit down. I am very pleased, my dear. I think I may safely say this is the happiest day of my life.”

Her beautiful face brightened.

“If you could have what I wish for you, papa, all your days would be happy.”

Lord St. Norman continued,—

“You know how dearly I have always loved you, Ethel—how proud I have always been of you. My love could desire no better fate than this in store for you. My pride could ask no higher destiny.”

He did not see the shadow that fell over her face.

“Your future has always been a subject of anxiety to me,” he pursued; “not in respect of money—I have known

of late years that you would have a sufficiency of that—but as regards whom you would love, and whom you would marry. You have all the Gordon sensitiveness and Gordon pride—and I know how much proud, sensitive people suffer. You would have been one of the most miserable women living if you had been unfortunate in your love.”

Her lips quivered—the tears rose to his eyes, but she repressed them, remembering Sir Oscar’s words. No murmur should escape her—no regret because of her mournful, blighted life.

“Now,” Lord St. Norman went on, “I am more than happy—I am quite content. This letter that I hold in my hand is from the Duke of Southmead. He asks my permission to make you his wife, and that permission I most gladly concede.”

Ethel’s face grew colorless, and her eyes shadowed as she listened.

“I have the highest possible opinion of the duke,” continued Lord St. Norman; “he is a gentleman in the highest, noblest sense of the word. He will make you happy by his kindness, and by his gentle, considerate manner; he is truthful and honorable; above all, he is amiable—and, Ethel, you will know how to appreciate constant good temper and sunshine in the house. I am convinced that you will be perfectly happy.”

She opened her lips to speak, but the sound died away upon them. It seemed to her that she could not bear to disappoint him.

“Then, as to position,” pursued Lord St. Norman, “you will occupy a position second only to that of royalty. The Duke of Southmead is not only one of the wealthiest, but he is one of the most distinguished peers in England. I do not think the most ambitious father living could desire a happier lot for his child. As Duchess of Southmead,

you will be the most popular woman in England. My darling, I am so thankful for you—so content.”

Then she said to herself that it was time she spoke—time she told him these hopes of his could never be realized. She went over to him and laid her hands on his shoulder, looking wistfully into his happy face.

“Papa,” she said, sadly, “it cannot be. I am grieved that you shall be disappointed; I am more sorry than I can express. I would do almost anything to give you pleasure, but I cannot do this. I cannot marry the Duke of Southmead.”

He looked greatly disappointed—the happy smile died from his lips.

“You cannot, Ethel! Why not?”

“I do not love him, papa. I acknowledge the truth of all you say; he is one of the most agreeable and kind-hearted men I have ever met. But I do not love him. I cannot marry him.”

Lord St. Norman looked anxiously at her.

“Ethel,” he said gravely, “you have too much common sense to refuse such a magnificent offer from any foolish schoolgirl notions of love and sentiment.”

“I have no schoolgirl notions,” she returned, sadly; “it would be better for me ten thousand times if I had.”

“Esteem is the surest, best, and safest foundation for love,” he pointed out. “You esteem the duke—you acknowledge that you think most highly of him. Love, the highest, best love of all, will surely follow.”

“Not in this case, papa,” she opposed. “I esteem and like him—I am grateful to him for the great honor he has paid me—but I cannot marry him.”

Lord St. Norman sighed.

“You were always a puzzle to me, Ethel,” he said, slowly. “Of late I have not understood you—nay, at times I have not recognized you as the Ethel who was like

sunshine in our home. I suppose, then, I must tell the duke that you decline?"

She clung to him, saying he was the kindest, the dearest, the best of fathers—that she loved him so dearly, and was so grieved to disappoint him—that it must not make any difference in his love to her—that he must always care for her the same—but that she could not marry the duke.

"We will say no more about it, then, Ethel. I will write to him to-day. Why, child, how pale you are. You need not be unhappy over it—no one can force you to marry; and you shall never marry, Ethel, with my consent until you really and truly fall in love."

---

## CHAPTER XXIX.

A GROUP of gentlemen stood under the trees in the park. They had been watching the fair faces of the ladies who passed in carriages, and the fresh faces of young girls who rode. The day was beautiful, the sun shining brightly, and half the *elite* of London seemed to be in the park.

The group of gentlemen consisted of Sir Oscar Charl-cote, Lord Caton, Major Argent, and Sir Harry Laine. The subject under discussion was a rumor that had startled the fashionable world.

"It is all over with the Richmond dinners," observed Lord Caton. "Southmead has left London. The whole affair is given up. I had a note from him yesterday."

"So had I," said the major.

The young duke had organized a grand water-party that was to terminate with a dinner at Richmond. Suddenly, to their surprise, the invited guests received a note expressing infinite regret at the unavoidable disappoint-

ment, but that the Duke of Southmead was obliged to leave London that very day.

"Leave London in the midst of the season!" cried Sir Harry Laine. "What is the reason?"

Then came the startling report that Miss St. Norman had refused him, and that he had gone away in a fit of desperation. Sir Charles Myrton had met the duke coming from Brookdale House—had seen him with his face white as death, and his lips trembling. He had stopped to speak to him, but the young duke had passed on with something that sounded like a deep, muttered curse. Afterward he heard what rumor said. Sir Charles understood it all; and now the little group under the trees were discussing the same event.

"Do you really believe," asked Lord Caton, "that Miss St. Norman has refused him?"

"It is a fact, I assure you;" replied the major. "I always thought she would. Yet I never saw a man so thoroughly in love. He followed her like a shadow. But I never saw her give him the least encouragement."

"That would be a new experience for him," commented Lord Caton. "Young dukes, as a rule, do not complain of wanting encouragement."

"I felt sure," resumed the major, "that she would not have him. I was quite desperate about her myself the first few times that I saw her. But Miss St. Norman is not like the ordinary run of women. She is no coquette; she never seems to give a thought to love or matrimony. Indeed, in my opinion she dislikes both."

Sir Oscar Charlote listened attentively.

"I yield to no one in my chivalrous respect for women," he said; "but I must confess that I find it difficult to believe that a rich and handsome young duke could meet with a refusal."

"It is true," declared the major. "I am sorry for



Southmead—he was desperately fond of her. He has taken it deeply to heart. I hear that he first went home, and then started off the same day for the Continent.”

“That much is true,” said Lord Caton; “as to the rest, I reserve my opinion.”

“What is she like—this Miss St. Norman?” asked Sir Oscar.

“Have you not seen her?” cried three of the group at once.

“No. She was at Lady Crane’s ball, I believe; I met her father there, but I did not stay long. I have never seen her. What is she like?”

“Like no one whom you have ever seen, or whom I can name,” replied the major. “She is the most beautiful girl in all England. She is very clever,” continued the speaker, “witty, quick at repartee, and brilliant in sarcasm. But she is not to be judged by ordinary rules.”

“Why not?” asked Sir Oscar.

“Because she is not like ordinary people. She is proud and cold, with a certain graceful haughtiness about her, a proud, serene indifference which I cannot describe. You must see her in order to understand me. I do not believe she cares for compliment, nor do I believe that there is a man living who could bring a bright flush to her beautiful face.”

“Has she been unhappy in any love affair?” asked Sir Oscar.

“I think not,” answered the major, laughing. “With all her stately beauty and queenly grace, her proud indifference and imperial reserve, she is only a girl—not more than eighteen, I am sure. Look—those are the St. Norman liveries. Now you will see her.”

As he spoke a carriage passed slowly along. Sir Oscar looking up, saw a girl who seemed to him more lovely than any artist’s dream—a beautiful face, dainty in bloom,

perfect in feature, lovely with an inexpressible charm, yet with a touch of sadness which heightened its beauty. The curved, faultless lips were sad ; the bright, proud eyes, not melancholy, not pensive, but sad. He saw rich masses of golden-brown hair. He looked at her lingeringly, and as the carriage passed, her eyes met his. At that very moment she was thinking of the memorable words that he had spoken to his brother ; the sunshine and the flowers had brought to her mind St. Ina's, with its sad memories. She had just repeated his words to herself when she saw him. Their eyes met, and they looked at each other—the two who were to love and suffer as few did—and then the carriage passed on, Sir Oscar gazing after it, and then rousing himself with a deep sigh, as one who awakes from a dream.

“ She is very lovely,” he said, slowly, “ but not happy ; her face is perfect, but it is not a happy face ; young as she is, there is a story in it—one not pleasant to remember.”

“ The same thought struck me,” acknowledged the major. “ I have been in love many times in my life, but I really never did admire any one so much as I do Miss St. Norman.”

“ You had no chance, I suppose, major ? ” interrogated Lord Caton.

“ Not the least in the world ; ” he confessed, good-temperedly. “ I do not think she saw me more than once, and then her beautiful eyes dismissed me.”

“ Why did she refuse the Duke of Southmead ? ” asked Sir Oscar.

“ She did not love him,” answered Lord Caton ; “ she is a girl who would consider the world well lost for love—that is, if her face tells the truth.”

The group separated soon afterward, but Sir Oscar thought long and deeply of the fair-faced girl who had refused a duke because she did not love him.

“There must be plenty of my favorite virtue there,” he said to himself; “she must have plenty of courage.”

It was not long before the news had spread. Fashionable London had been startled once, and that was when it was first known that the duke was in love with Miss St. Norman; now it was startled again on hearing that she had refused him—“had positively refused him, with his ducal coronet, his handsome face, and his rent-roll of over two hundred thousand per annum!”

Ladies held up their hands in wonder. What was she waiting for—what did she expect? They were relieved, yet angry. Having refused him, she had driven him from London; for that they were annoyed. But he was still free; and now there was a chance for some other fair face.

Ethel had been famous for her beauty, but now she had a new claim to honor. She was “the beautiful Miss St. Norman, who had refused the Duke of Southmead.” She was more celebrated for that than she would have been if she had married him.

Some pronounced her ambitious; they said that she must be waiting for a foreign prince, and that her pride would have a fall. Others smilingly asserted that she was romantic, and had ideas of love which could never be realized. Who guessed the truth, that the young, beautiful, and beloved daughter of an ancient line, the heiress of great wealth, was the wife of a common felon? Who guessed the terrible secret that by night and by day stood by her side and darkened every moment of her life?

## CHAPTER XXX.

ETHEL had felt profound pity, for the young duke ; his handsome face had grown white and haggard as he listened to the words which told him his fate.

“Will you answer one question?” he said. “If I wait for years, if I try all that man can try, will it be of any use?”

“No,” she replied, gravely. “I have been frank with you. You have my esteem, my friendly liking, but I can never give you more.”

“Never,” he repeated—“in all time?”

“No,” said Ethel. “The best thing you can do is to forget me.”

“I shall never forget you,” he cried bitterly.

She realized what love meant when she looked on his face and saw the bitter grief there. That was love—the terrible, earnest passion that had such power over the human heart. She had never felt anything like that. Once for a few minutes she had been uncomfortable because Laurie Nugent looked grieved. The feeling was soon over—she hardly remembered it; but she owned to herself that, if at any time he had said he must leave St. Ina’s, she would not have felt one tithe of the regret and pain that filled the heart of the Duke of Southmead.

Oh, blind and foolish, to have mistaken that fleeting fancy for love! Oh, blind and foolish, to have thought a man like Laurie Nugent could ever win love from her.

For the first time, too, a great fear came over her. She had never loved Laurie Nugent. She had mistaken fancy for affection—she had taken the shadow for the sub-

stance. What if a time should come when she should meet with any one whom she could love—any one to whom her soul should be drawn by that irresistible force men call love?

“I must be on my guard,” she thought—“that is a danger I had almost overlooked. I must be on my guard. If I find that I am likely to love any one, I must never see him again!”

So she, in her earnest simplicity, planned and arranged. She did not wish to increase her sin. It was bad enough—it must not be made worse by any complications. She had done all that lay in her power to prevent the young Duke from falling in love with her, and she could not accuse herself of having sought to attract attention. In her half-childlike, half-womanly wisdom, she arranged with herself that, if ever she should find herself in danger of liking any man she would instantly renounce his acquaintance. It was strange that she never looked forward—that no hope of relief ever occurred to her. She never thought to herself that perhaps death might prove her friend; that Laurie Nugent might die. The chains that she wore were to bind her for ever. No hope of laying them down crossed her mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord St. Norman gave a grand dinner-party, and one of the guests whom he invited was Oscar Charlcote.

“I hope Ethel will like him,” he said to his wife. “I think Oscar Charlcote the finest fellow in England.”

“Better than the Duke of Southmead?” interrupted Helen, demurely.

“My dearest Helen,” rejoined Lord St. Norman, laughing, “without wishing to be disrespectful to either gentleman, I may say there is as great a difference between them as between a noble retriever and a spaniel.”

“Sir Oscar being the retriever?” said Helen.

"Precisely so. I begin to think, Helen, that with all her pride Ethel has a great fund of romance. Since she refused the Duke of Southmead I have come to this conclusion, that she will most probably fall in love with some artist or poet—and I should not like that. If she must have a hero, she could not find a more noble one than Sir Oscar. I suppose I had not better say so to her."

"Certainly not," decided Helen, quietly. "Let her have her own way entirely. There is something of the grand and heroic in Ethel's character. When she does fall in love it will be with some one like herself."

"There is one thing you can do," suggested Lord St. Norman. "She always looks beautiful, yet it seems to me she is indifferent about dress. You might superintend her toilet, and see that she looks her best to-night."

Lady St. Norman promised, but she kept her promise without any gleam of hope in it. She had been more puzzled than any one by Ethel's rejection of the young duke. She came to the conclusion that, young as she was, Ethel in all probability had formed a resolution never to marry.

"She has all the Gordon pride," thought Lady St. Norman, "and, if she has made such a resolution, she will doubtless keep it."

But, to please her husband, she had a most exquisite costume arranged for Ethel—a dress of white silk, richly and elaborately trimmed with pink hawthorn. Even Ethel, indifferent as she was to dress, gave a little startled cry of surprise when she saw it. Helen kissed the fair young face.

"You will be your brightest and best to-night, Ethel, will you not? Your father is so proud of you, I ought to be jealous; but I cannot be."

The dinner-party was not a large one, but the few assembled were all celebrated in some way or other. There was a leading statesman, one or two members of Parliament,

a celebrated writer, one or two leaders of fashion, and Ethel—a quiet, select little party. Sir Oscar Charlcote was included in the number of guests.

Lord St. Norman looked anxiously at his daughter as she entered the drawing-room. There was a slight flush on her beautiful face, and her eyes were bright as stars. He was delighted with the elegance of her dress, and the charming grace of her appearance. She had been there some little time when Sir Oscar Charlcote was announced. She looked up in interested wonder when he entered. What was he like, this man, a few of whose words had made so great an impression upon her? She saw a tall, noble looking gentleman, with an erect figure and military bearing. His face was not exactly handsome, but it was frank, full of courage, of fire, of genius—a face to be trusted and loved.

Ethel thought of her father's description—he combined the gentleness of a child with the bravery of a lion. She believed it; the tall, powerful figure, the noble face, the fearless eyes, were combined with a mouth gentle and beautiful as that of any woman. She looked at him earnestly. He was the ideal of a soldier and a gentleman. Truth and chivalry were in his face, gentleness and dauntless bravery.

“If his mind matches his face and figure,” she thought to herself, “I shall like Sir Oscar Charlcote.”

She found herself wishing that he would speak to her. She would like to see him smile—she would like to hear him speak. In a few minutes her desire was gratified. Lord St. Norman crossed the room, bringing Sir Oscar with him.

Ethel's first sensation as he bowed before her was one of delight that her idea of him was verified—that his smile was sweet and gentle as that of a woman or a child. Then she found herself looking at his face, and wondering where she had seen him before. Lord St. Norman left them, while he went to welcome some other guests; and then

Sir Oscar sat down by Ethel's side. She was looking half wistfully in his face.

"Sir Oscar," she said, suddenly, "I cannot divest myself of the idea that I have seen you before. Yet I cannot remember where."

"I saw you, Miss St. Norman," he observed, smiling, "In the Park. I was standing with a group of friends when your carriage passed by."

Then she remembered the face that had attracted her attention—she remembered the words that had been in her mind at the time—his own words—and a crimson blush burned her face.

He looked surprised. Why should this proud girl, who was so indifferent to all men, blush at those simple words from him? But he was interested—touched by it as he would not have been by anything else. They talked together for the short space of time that elapsed before dinner, and then Sir Oscar escorted her to the dining-room. He sat by her during dinner, and was charmed with her; her wondrous beauty, her pleasant words, her bright eyes charmed him; he found himself looking at her in wonder.

"This is the girl," he said to himself, "who refused the best match in England, who refused the young duke. I am not surprised, now that I have seen her; she does not look like one who would marry for money—she has the noblest and most beautiful face I have ever seen."

For the first time Sir Oscar was distraught; he was generally considered one of the most amusing companions, but on the occasion his thoughts were all engrossed by the beautiful face which had charmed him so greatly.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

ETHEL thought of the dark-eyed, noble soldier who had been so attentive and kind to her. She hoped he would rejoin her in the drawing-room, for his conversation interested her. She thought much of his history of that terrible scene under the burning Indian sun—of the murdered wife, the tortured children, the husband whose greatest pain was that he could not avenge them. Then she began to wonder how he could ever again feel light-hearted enough to mix in the gay world, to share its pleasures or amusements. She fancied that the memory of that scene must be always with him. She looked up with a start; the object of her thoughts was standing before her. His noble face was brightened with a beautiful, luminous smile.

“Miss St. Norman,” he said, “you look so deeply buried in your thoughts that, if they are pleasant ones, it would really be unkind to disturb you.”

Her face flushed at his words. She knew that she was thinking of him; and then she caught herself wondering why this man had the power of calling those burning blushes to her face when no other could.

“May I find a place near you?” he inquired. “I should like to finish that little discussion of ours.”

She made way for him, and he sat down by her side; but, when the “little discussion” was ended, he showed no great desire to leave her, and she was almost unconscious of the great pleasure she felt in his society. On the table before them lay some elegantly-bound books of poetry. He opened one and looked carelessly through it.

“Which is your favorite poet, Miss St. Norman?” he asked.

“The one who teaches the best lesson of endurance,” she replied—“the one whose pages are full of calm courage and fortitude.”

He looked at her in some surprise.

“Is endurance your favorite virtue?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered, gravely.

“Pardon me—you are young—how can you have learned to care for a hard virtue like that, one acquired only after years of suffering?”

She thought to herself. “If he knew—if he only knew!”

“Perhaps,” he continued, with the smile she was beginning to like so well, “you admire it merely theoretically. You like it so well, I trust you may never be called upon to practice it.”

“Why should you wish that?” she asked, suddenly. “I thought men and women never became thoroughly noble until they had suffered. I have read somewhere that suffering is the great dignifier of life.”

“I should say that much depends on what the suffering is,” he replied, thoughtfully. “There can be no doubt that that which comes from Heaven ennobles those who bear it patiently—ennobles them as nothing else can.”

“But what of those who suffer by their own fault,” she cried eagerly—“who have brought the punishment of their offenses on themselves—what of them?”

He looked slightly surprised at her earnestness.

“Even then,” he answered, “when it is, as you say, their own fault brought upon them in consequence of folly and sin—even then I think such suffering, patiently borne, ennobles man and woman too; it teaches them lessons they could learn in no other school—it elevates them. As a rule, it makes them kinder of heart, and more considerate for others.”

“Tell me another thing,” she asked, “which is the harder to bear, mental or physical pain?”

“I should say mental pain. The smart of a burn, the anguish of a wound, the long distress of a severe illness—all are hard to bear; but to me they seem nothing when compared with mental pain. The depression nothing can remove, the regret nothing can stifle, the despair nothing can alleviate—all these are far worse than mere physical pain.”

She looked up at him suddenly, and then her eyes drooped and her face flushed.

“You were going to ask me a question,” he said. “What is it? Your eyes have asked it already—your lips need not hesitate to repeat it.”

“I shall be afraid of you,” she said, blushing; “you read my thoughts.”

“I may guess them,” he rejoined; “I cannot read them. What was the question your eyes asked me?”

“Have you suffered the mental pain that you seem to understand so well?” she inquired.

He was silent for a few minutes, and then he replied,—

“Yes, I have endured both; and, I repeat, physical pain is the easier to bear.”

She looked at the noble face, with its grand resolve; and again she imagined that awful scene under the burning sun. She could fancy him wounded, and bound; she could imagine him, with stern face and firm lips, crying out: “Set your teeth and die hard,” now that she knew him, and looked at him. She could better understand all the brave endurance, the courage, the fearlessness. What would he say, she wondered, if he knew that he had been an influence in her life—that he had first taught her to look up from the slough of despond, and take higher views.

Suddenly she became aware that he was looking at her again with the same bright, grave smile.

“Miss St. Norman,” he said, “we have chosen a strange subject; and a dinner-party is hardly the occasion one would select for the discussion of pain.”

“I have an unfortunate habit of speaking of the subject that occupies me,” she confessed.

“And you were thinking so intently of pain? That is a strange subject for a young lady’s musing.”

“Is it?” she asked, simply.

“I think so. A young girl’s thoughts should be devoted to music or flowers, to pleasure past or to come; her musings should be bright, cheerful, hopeful,”

“Mine never are,” she sighed, and then she seemed to repent of her words, and he, seeing that she wished them unspoken, took no notice of them.

“As a stranger to you,” he said, “I must apologize for what I am going to say. Will you give me a full and free pardon before I commit the offense?”

“Yes,” she replied; “you may say what you will to me.”

“Then forgive me if I tell you that I think you are inclined to look upon the gloomy side of life. There is plenty of pain, but there is also plenty of pleasure. Do you never think of that—of all that life holds so bright and beautiful men never wish to leave it?”

“No,” she replied, “my thoughts seldom dwell on that brighter side.”

“That seems strange,” he returned. “You are the first young lady I have met with of so peculiar a turn of mind.”

She thought to herself, with a bitterness words could not describe, that she was in all probability the only one he had ever met with who carried about with her a terrible secret—the only one who, bearing a noble name, was in secrecy the wife of a criminal.

“You do not think I am presuming upon your kindness in speaking so freely?” he inquired.

“No,” she replied, raising her sweet, clear eyes to his face—“I am grateful to you. I shall remember all that you have said.” Presently she asked, “Do you remember these lines of Barry Cornwall’s

“ ‘ We toil through pain and wrong—  
 We fight, and fly—  
 We love—we lose—and then ere long  
 Stone dead we lie.  
 O life, is all thy song  
 Endure and die ! ’

That is the great lesson—the great end of life,” she commented—“endure and die. When one has learned that, the secret of life is known.”

“My dear Miss St. Norman, what sad views you take ! Believe me, I have suffered my share—I have gone through the bitterness of death, yet did not die. For every one there is a vast amount of pleasure and happiness in this world, if they will but seek it. How is it that a man who has neither money, nor home, nor food, who is sick even unto death and worn with privation, whose every breath is full of pain—how is it that even such a man will cling with the utmost tenacity to life ? There must be something in it despite its sorrows, or we should not cling so eagerly to it.”

“But what,” she inquired, “if a person completely destroys all the possible happiness of a lifetime by one rash action.”

“That rarely happens,” he answered ; “and I do not think it possible to destroy all happiness. What, for instance, can take from us our love of Nature ? What, can change the beauty of the sunshine, the glory of the sunset, the holy calm of starlit nights, the mystical silence of the woods ? I would that I could choose for you books to

read, pictures to look at, scenes to enjoy, that would give you brighter, happier ideas of life than you seem to possess.

“You shall so teach me if you will,” she returned—and the compact was made then and there.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

ETHEL and Sir Oscar met next at a flower-show. Lord St. Norman had expressed a wish that his wife and daughter should both go. Ethel had almost implored him to excuse her, but he would not hear of it.

"It is not only, Ethel, that all the great world will be there," he said, "but the flowers themselves are so exceedingly beautiful. You will, I am sure be delighted."

"I do not like flowers," she said quickly.

"Not like them?" exclaimed Lady St. Norman. "Why, Ethel, I used to think you cared more for them than anything else!"

So she did—years ago; but now the very sight of flowers gave her pain. They were associated in her mind with St. Ina's and the fair summer morning when she had walked through the woods, in the midst of fragrance and bloom to her fatal marriage. They were full of silent, sad memories for her. She had been used to caress and love them like living friends; but she did so no longer—no one ever saw her linger over flowers or tend them. But, as her father had expressed a wish about the flower-show, she went.

She said to herself before they started that she would find no great pleasure in it; but she must go. She would have the fatigue of dressing, of walking for hours in the midst of fragrant blossoms, the odor of which would recall scenes she hated to remember, of listening to compliments that would be distasteful to her; she would feel strange and isolated in the midst of a bright crowd of happy faces, knowing that such happiness and such brightness could never come to her.

If she had looked in her mirror before starting, she must have been pleased with the picture she saw there—the beautiful face with its faint bloom; the rich brown hair that seemed to be crowned by the pretty little coquettish bonnet of white lace, with its one blush-rose. She looked so fair, so lovely, so young that it seemed impossible her life should have a dark and terrible side.

There was a long drive, and then they came to the gardens where the *fete* was being held. Despite her great sorrow, and the dark cloud that was not to be lifted from her life, youth reasserted itself. The sun was shining brightly, the bands were playing gayly, colored flags were flying from the trees. Ethel's face flushed, her eyes brightened, her heart beat. She saw the bright costumes of the ladies, beautiful and brilliant as the flowers themselves. For some few minutes she gave way to unusual exhilaration of spirits, and then she was her old self again. The memory of her terrible secret returned to her. What right had she here—the wife of a convicted felon.

Slowly and wearily she walked among the brilliant rows of bloom; she saw the faces of girls of the same age as herself all blithe and gay; she listened to their pretty, lively nonsense, feeling old, worn, and aged in comparison, and envying them, yet owning to herself there was no one to blame—it was her own fault.

“You are tired, Ethel,” said Lady St. Norman. “Rest here awhile, I am going with Lady Long to see the white camellias. Would you like to accompany us, or will you remain here?”

“I will rest,” decided Ethel.

It seemed to her a relief to be away from the sound of voices.

She wandered down a narrow path that seemed completely deserted. Here were no rows of blooming, fragrant blossoms, no laughing, bright-faced girls. She would



sit in golden-green light, and muse at her will over the one fatal error that had blighted her whole life. Presently she raised her eyes as a slight sound attracted her attention, and saw Sir Oscar coming toward her.

"I am so glad to see you, Miss St. Norman," he said. "I heard you were coming." He did not add, "so I came too," but the words were on his lips.

Her face brightened as she saw him.

"How brilliant the flowers are looking," he remarked. "Have you enjoyed them?"

Her face flushed, and she laughed.

"I must tell the truth," she replied. "I have not noticed them."

"I am not in the least surprised," he said, smiling. "You come to a flower-show, where sun and flowers are all bright as bright can be, and, instead of amusing yourself as any one else would do, you are here in the only dull part of the gardens, away from every one and everything. I need not ask the nature of your thoughts—one can read them in your face."

"I plead guilty," she responded.

"That is right," he said. "Now will you, having owned your fault, atone for it? Will you let me show you the flowers?"

She looked up brightly.

"Yes, I should like that very much," she acknowledged.

"All the gentlemen present will detest me, as a matter of course," he said, "for monopolizing the fairest flower in the gardens. I shall not care for that if you will promise to enjoy yourself. You do not know how I long to see a smile on your face—a happy, bright gratified smile."

They left the green shade and went out among the flowers. He had promised to amuse her, and he did so. He told her the most quaint and charming stories about flowers—old legends that he had read in rare books, grace-

ful stories that pleased her artistic imagination. He spoke of the flowers as though they were living and dear to him.

"It is strange that a soldier should be so fond of flowers," she said to him.

"I am not a soldier now," he corrected, laughingly. "I wish I were; one of the saddest days of my life was the day I gave up the army for what is called a country life—I liked the army best."

Since the days of her pretty fantastic rule in Fountayne Ethel had known few bright hours—childhood, girlhood, happiness, brightness had all come to an end together; but, looking back in after years, she thought of this as one of the most pleasant hours of her life. She forgot her troubles—for a few minutes she forgot the skeleton that was always by her side. She gave herself up to the sunshine of happiness, and in it she became radiantly lovely. Sir Oscar was more charmed than ever. She talked to him, revealing the rich treasures of imagination with which she was gifted. She gave him an insight to her mind, which was well stored with poetic lore. He was astonished to find how well read she was, and complimented her upon it.

"You must have spent a great deal of time in reading," he said—"more than is usual with most young ladies."

"Yes," she replied, "I love the world of books."

"Better than the world of men?" he asked.

"I think so," she answered, the dainty flush rising in her beautiful face. "There are no disappointments in books. You see from the first whether the hero and heroine are going to turn out good or bad. In real life you must wait for a man's death before you can possibly know that."

"You have strangely cynical ideas for one so young," he observed. "If I did not know you, Miss St. Norman,

I should imagine that you had been greatly disappointed in some one very dear to you."

His words were so near the truth that she looked at him in surprise.

"Would that make any one cynical?" she asked, simply.

"Yes, more cynical and bitter than anything else would," he replied.

It was a day of real happiness, but when it had ended, the old care returned to Ethel, and took possession of her with redoubled force.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

“WITH Sir Oscar Charlcote’s compliments.”

Ethel looked up, and there before her was one of the most superb bouquets ever arranged—flowers that she had admired greatly at the flower-show; there were specimens of each, and as they were carried into the room their odor filled it.

Without comment she took the bouquet from the servant’s hand. How beautiful they were, the sweet, fragrant blossoms, rare in color, rare in perfume! She buried her face in them—they were the first flowers she had enjoyed for so long. Some lines she had read on the previous day came back to her mind:

“The smell of violets hidden in the green.  
 Poured back upon my empty soul and frame  
 The times when I remember to have been  
 Joyful and free from blame.”

The odor of the sweet flowers brought her to that happy time before cruel revenge had awoke in her heart, and had driven her to that hurried, desperate marriage.

Still, that morning—she did not quite understand why—life seemed to have a new interest for her. Sir Oscar had mentioned a book which he recommended her to read, and she was anxious to do so. When breakfast was over she hastened to the library, and when Lady St. Norman sought her, some time afterward, she found her reading, with flushed face and brightened eyes.

“You are growing quite studious, Ethel,” said Lady St. Norman.

“Sir Oscar Charlcote told me that I should like this book, and I find it most amusing.”

Then she wondered why she blushed, and Lady St.

Norman was too wise to make the least comment or even smile.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lord St. Norman determined upon giving a dinner at Richmond, a species of entertainment in which he took great delight. It was a small, select, but very happy party, and Sir Oscar was one of the guests invited.

Ethel was pleased when she heard that Sir Oscar was going. It was the first time she had felt even the least interest in any party; but she had begun to experience some degree of pleasure in the baronet's society. She enjoyed his conversation. She felt, in some vague way, that she had found a friend—one whom she liked, upon whom she could rely. She admired his brave way of speaking, his bright, fearless thoughts, the true nobility that pervaded every word.

"I am glad that I have found a friend," the girl thought, "there is not much left to me in life, but this will be a real interest—a real pleasure."

She felt better than she had felt since that fatal day at St. Ina's, when she had exchanged her happiness, her freedom, and her name for chains and a wedding-ring. For the first time for many long months she opened her heart to the sunshine of happiness. She let her sorrow and her despair fall in the background, and the effect upon her was marvellous. She felt dazed and giddy, as one who, having been long caged in darkness and gloom, is suddenly brought into the full, clear light of day. For the first time she took an interest in the pleasures offered to her, and went so far as to ask Lady St. Norman about a dress for the *fete*.

It was a very beautiful day—the sun was shining, the air was warm, soft, and full of fragrance. Sir Oscar, according to arrangement, was to drive down to Richmond with Lord St. Norman. Ethel looked more beautiful than

usual ; the fresh, fragrant air brought a soft flush to her face and brightened the lovely eyes. Her dress, too, was perfection—a pretty blue and white—and she wore one of the most coquettish of bonnets. The beautifully curved lips were parted with a smile, such as had not lingered there since she had been mistress of Fountayne. She did not know why she felt so happy, so light of heart, unless it was that she had made a friend. She smiled to herself as they drove along the sunny road.

“ Friendship is supposed to be one of the great joys of life,” she said, “ and I have completely overlooked it. I can never have a lover, but I thank Heaven that I have found a friend.”

That evening, when dinner was over, and the elders of the party were discussing some excellent wine, Ethel went out on the balcony. The purple gloaming lay over the land, the sky was growing more darkly blue, and the stars were beginning to gleam. The river ran lightly and swiftly by—the pleasure boats were hastening down the stream—the trees were all luxuriantly green—the perfume of flowers reached her. That balcony was a favorite resort of hers.

They had been twice to Richmond, and each time she had spent the soft sweet twilight hours in watching the beautiful panorama of earth and sky which could be so pleasantly seen from there.

A beautiful holy calm seemed to pervade the whole of Nature, and Ethel felt that she could enjoy it. Hitherto she had been a prey to her own bitter thoughts, her own despair ; now she had found a friend. Heaven and earth seemed fairer for this, that she had found a friend.

Her beautiful face was softened into tenderness as she sat there in the starlight. Was there really any brightness, any music left on earth for her ? Yes—for she had found a friend.

Ethel was pure of heart and guileless of soul as a little child sleeping in its mother's arms. There was not the faintest idea of wrong in her mind ; and, even as once before she had mistaken fancy for love, so she now mistook the dawn of love for friendship.

It was no surprise to her when Sir Oscar, parting the heavy hangings that screened the window, came out to her. He stood in silence by her side for a few minutes, and, in some vague way that she could not understand, it seemed as though his presence made the beauty of the scene complete.

"You are looking brighter and better to-day, Miss St. Norman," he said. "I am so pleased. I think you have been following my advice."

"I have," she acknowledged freely. "I have read the book you mentioned to me, and it has done me good."

"I knew it would. I shall never be able to understand Miss St. Norman, what it is that has given you, in the brightest part of your youth, such gloomy ideas of life."

He saw her beautiful face grow pale ; he saw in the starlight how suddenly the shadow came into her beautiful eyes, and he hastened to add,—

"I am so glad that you permitted me to advise you. To use a figure of speech, you seemed to be drifting down a stream. My hands are strong ; let them pull you back."

"I was drifting," she confessed slowly.

"And now that is checked—you are learning to take pleasure where you can find it," he pursued.

"Yes," she assented, with a little low laugh that fell like softest music on his ear. "I find pleasure here to-night."

He watched her in silence, thinking to himself that earth had nothing one-half so fair as this beautiful, graceful girl. Rousing himself from the glamour that seemed

to be falling over him, Sir Oscar began to talk to her. The poetry of the hour seemed to animate him.

“I wonder,” said Sir Oscar, slowly, “how many people have sat in this balcony, happy as we are, and what has become of them?”

“That is rather a wide field for speculation,” she remarked.

“Yes—but I think the place is rather celebrated. You have heard of Lord Daybrook, who murdered his wife in a fit of jealousy, and afterwards killed himself?”

“I have heard of him,” replied Ethel.

“It is said that he made the unhappy lady an offer of marriage in this very balcony. Think of the tragical end of that love story! Then I have heard of two young lovers whose parents were not willing for them to marry, and they met here to bid each other farewell. Think of the hope, the despair, the love and the sorrow that have been experienced here!”

She was looking intently at the gleaming stars.

“I can imagine it all,” she responded, “but it gives me strange thoughts. Those who loved each other so well are dead and gone; murder and suicide took the place of happiness. Men’s lives and fortune are full of change—Nature never changes. The lovers who sat here then are dead, but the stars are shining with the same soft light, the river is rippling with the same sweet murmur—man seems small and insignificant, after all.”

“Not quite. The time will come when the stars shall fall from heaven, and the rivers, shrinking, disappear from sight; but the soul of man once created, is immortal.”

“I had forgotten that,” she allowed, gently.

One white hand of hers lay on the stone balcony, so white in the starlight that it looked like snow. Sir Oscar laid his own upon it. She did not start nor shrink—that



warm, gentle clasp seemed like a promise of protection to her.

“Miss St. Norman,” he said, gently, “will you enter into a compact with me?”

“Yes,” she replied, “willingly.”

“Let us be friends—I mean, not merely acquaintances, but friends, in the highest, best, and noblest sense of the word.”

Her face flushed with delight; he saw the beautiful color spread over it.

“Friends,” he continued, “through life—never to lose sight of each other again—your pleasures, pains, hopes, joys and sorrows to be mine.”

“Is that friendship?” she asked, gently.

“Yes, the noblest and the best—the friendship that strengthens all that is highest, that helps one to live and die worthily—friendship that is patient, tender, and true; that stands as a shield, that is as firm as a rock, and believes no evil. Miss St. Norman, will you join in such a compact of friendship with me?”

She looked up at him half shyly.

“Why do you ask me?” she inquired.

“Because I am irresistibly attracted to you,” he acknowledged; “and I long with all my heart and soul to be your friend. Will you promise?”

“It is a very serious promise,” she remarked.

“I know it; but it is one that will make me happy, Miss St. Norman.”

“Then I give it to you” she said. “I promise to be your friend.”

“Thank you” he returned, gratefully; and then silence ensued again.

He was the first to break it.

“You will think I presume upon your kindness, Miss St. Norman,” he said, “if I ask something more.”

"I shall not think so," confessed Ethel.

"Then, just once, on this fair summer night, let me hear you call me 'dear friend.' Say those two words to me, and I shall be content."

She repeated them, and Sir Oscar Charlcote thought no utterance had ever been so sweet.

All night Ethel thought of the simple words; they seemed to rest in her heart, to give her greater peace than she had known for a long time, and she was grateful enough to kneel and thank Heaven that she had at last found a gleam of light in the darkness—that she had found such a friend.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

ETHEL was always at her best with Sir Oscar. He had the power of bringing out all that was noblest in her. Her intellect, fancy, imagination, all seemed at the highest when she was talking to him. She never looked so beautiful or talked so well as with him: Her mind seemed to answer to his, her quick, light, vivid fancy to respond to every word of his. She began to look forward to seeing him as one of the pleasures of her existence. One of her earliest thoughts in the mornings would be, "Shall I see him to-day? Where will it be? What will he say? And she reached this stage so unconsciously that she would have been surprised if any one had said to her, "How very much and how often you think of Sir Oscar Charlcote!" She thought, in her simplicity, that it was happiness at having found a friend—a real friend—that was making life so much more bright for her.

The Duchess of Clanbrook gave a garden-party, at which Ethel was queen. Lady St. Norman smiled to see how she was beginning to take an interest in her toilet. She fancied that the dark cloud which had so long rested on the girl's life was lifted at last. Ethel chose a very beautiful dress and a most becoming bonnet. She went to the gathering, hoping she should see Sir Oscar there. It would be pleasant to while away the summer hours by his side—her friend—that dear friend whose care for her made her so happy.

She went. There was a large crowd of fashionable people present, and the scene was one of great beauty and animation. The party was held on a large and exceedingly beautiful lawn, where great cedar-trees made pleasant

shade, rare flowers gave out sweetest odors, and pretty fountains sent their rippling spray high in the sunlight. It was a striking scene—one not easily forgotten.

The fairest face in that brilliant throng was that of Ethel Gordon. No sooner did she appear than she was surrounded by a court of admirers. She talked for a short time with more than her usual animation, hoping and expecting every moment that Sir Oscar would appear; but time passed on and he did not come. Then her high spirits failed her. She made her escape from her admirers and wandered into one of the pretty ferneries. Here all was cool, green, and pleasant. She lingered. The waters fell with a soft rippling sound, the ferns stirred lightly in the wind. She sat down to enjoy the pretty solitude.

All at once she saw Sir Oscar. He was walking through the fernery, and had suddenly caught a glimpse of her. His face brightened, the grave, luminous smile she liked so much came over it. He advanced eagerly to her.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, Miss St. Norman," he said. "I was just thinking of going away, fearing you were not here."

"The crowd is so great," she observed. "I have been on the lawn, but I did not see you."

He sat down by her side. If she had been wiser she would have understood herself better. Everything seemed to change when he appeared. The sunshine was brighter, a fairer green came on the grass, the flowers took rarer colors, the birds sang more sweetly, the whole aspect of heaven and earth seemed changed to her—and yet it never, even ever so faintly, dawned across her mind that this was love.

She was surprised to find that an hour had passed since he appeared—it seemed to her only a few minutes.

"I think," she said to him, with a smile, "that you have the faculty of making time fly; I had no idea that

we had passed a whole hour in listening to the music of that cascade."

"I may make the same complaint," he responded—"hours in your society take unto themselves wings and fly."

She laughed, and rose from her seat, yet she did not like going away from the cool, fresh ferns.

"This seems to be the pleasantest part of the grounds," she said; "I admire ferns very much."

"So do I," he remarked, "but I have never admired them so much as to-day."

And then they walked back to the lawn together. Many admiring glances followed them; people whispered to each other that sooner or later that would be a match.

"I can understand now," said one lady to another, "why Miss St. Norman refused the Duke of Southmead."

"It was not for Sir Oscar's sake," was the rejoinder. "She had not even seen him when the Duke of Southmead left London."

The comments made did not reach her ears—and it was well for Sir Oscar that they did not. He saw that the pretty legend of friendship sufficed for her. She was unconscious of aught else. He loved her with a strong, deep, earnest love. He had never been charmed by the fair face of a woman before, he had that most rare gift to offer her—the first love of his heart. He knew that by her side, no matter what troubles came, life would be one long course of happiness—one long unbroken dream of delight. He knew also that, if she refused him, all that this world could offer would not atone to him for the loss.

His great love made him cautious. If he had had less at stake, he would have been rasher and more daring; he would have told her at once that he loved her, and have asked her to be his wife. Love made him prudent. He knew that some of the most eligible men in England had tried in vain to win her favor. He could not bear the

thought of losing her, so he called caution to his aid. He would not startle her by speaking too soon of his love ; he would give her plenty of time to grow accustomed to him.

He was not vain, but he did think she was beginning to like him. She seemed more at home, more at ease with him than with any one else. He thought to himself that, if needful, he would wait long years in silence for her—she was so dear, so precious, so well worth winning.

He said nothing to her of love. Like a cautious general, he advanced by degrees. He was content for a time with having won her liking ; he wanted to accustom her to his society—to teach her to rely upon him ; and he succeeded. Slowly and gradually a new life opened to her, and she was quite unconscious of it. The old interest that she felt in poetry and art, her passionate love of nature, her animation, all seemed to return to her.

“I am much happier,” she would say to herself, “because I have found a friend.”

She was like a child who sleeps serenely in the midst of fair and fragrant flowers, never seeing the crested head of the snake that is about to sting. She was so utterly unconscious that this vague happiness, this delicious calm came from the dawn of love, that she would say to herself :

“Now that I have found true friendship, I shall never need love. There will be no danger for me.”

Her idea of love was something all tumult, all tempestuous despair. She did not imagine it to be this golden calm, this beauteous harmony which seemed to pervade heart and soul, this new light which, dawning on her life, made it inexpressibly sweet, this golden glamour which made earth and sky ten thousand times fairer. Looking at her face, she did not understand why, day by day, it grew fairer, sweeter, and younger—why her eyes grew bright as stars, and her lips learned once more to smile.

“I am learning to forget my trouble,” she said : “I

am beginning to live it down. Ah, me! what fables poets sing! They tell us life is all barren without love. I do not find it so : love is a torment, friendship is all joy and no pain. While I can have that, 'love may linger, love may die.' I am indifferent."

She little dreamed how she was mistaking one for the other, nor how the love that she scorned and despised was silently, surely winning her, and making earth all bright for her.

Before the season was over she had many eligible offers, but to Lord St. Norman's surprise, she refused them all.

"I believe," he said to his wife, "that she likes Sir Oscar best of all, and that he is waiting to be sure before he risks asking the question."

In this opinion Lady St. Norman did not quite coincide.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

THE season was drawing to a close, and Lord St. Norman began to think it was high time that he and his left town. He expressed his wish to his wife, and she was anxious that it should be carried out.

When Ethel heard it, her thoughts flew at once to Sir Oscar. By this time he had become so completely part of her life that she did not know what that life would be without him. It was he who directed her reading, who chose her books, who helped to complete her art education, who taught her the beauty of goodness, of courage, and of patience, who made all the brightness of her life. Now, for the first time since she had begun to know the value of his friendship, she was to be separated from him, and he was to pass out of her life.

Still the pain she suffered did not open her eyes. She believed she was grieved to lose her friend, and in that friend saw no lover. Sir Oscar had long foreseen that this separation must take place, and he had made his arrangements.

"If I can but induce her to write to me," he thought to himself. "I shall have gained as great a point as when I won her promise to be my friend."

"Lord St. Norman tells me you are going away next week. How I shall miss you!" he said to her. "It will seem to me as though one-half of my life were gone."

They had met at Lady Casteldine's concert, and under cover of a grand overture Sir Oscar pleaded his cause. Ethel looked very lovely. As he glanced at her he could not help thinking how changed she was from the time when he had first seen her. The listlessness and melancholy



had vanished from her face, her eyes were bright, there was a look of hope and happiness about her which had been previously wanting. Her dress, too, was, as usual, perfection—white silk, with trimmings of gold fringe; a pomegranate blossom was in the coils of her rich brown hair.

“You never carry flowers,” he said to her suddenly; “every other lady in the room has a bouquet. You always prefer a fan. How is it?”

He saw a shadow fall over her face. How could she tell him that she never carried flowers in her hands without thinking of that fatal summer morning when she had gathered the passion-flowers wet with dew. He saw in a moment that his words had aroused some sad and unpleasant memory in her mind, and he hastened to make her forget them.

“How I shall miss you,” he repeated. “I do not like to think of the time coming, when I shall see you no longer.”

“Life is all meeting and parting,” she said, “even as it is all pleasure and pain.”

Yet her lips quivered as she spoke, and her beautiful eyes grew dim with unshed tears. Sir Oscar looked wistfully at her. The impulse and the longing were strong upon him to take her hands in his own and tell her the story of his love—tell her how passionately he loved her; but he restrained himself.

“She is sorry to lose me,” he said to himself. “I can see that; but I must not startle her. She is like a shy, bright, beautiful wild bird. I must not startle her.”

So he sat and watched her with wistful, longing loving eyes; but no word of that which filled his heart passed his lips.

“Miss St. Norman,” he said suddenly, “you have been very kind to me; you have promised to be my friend—and

I believe that nothing but death will ever sever the bonds of our friendship."

She raised her eyes to his.

"You are right," she asserted; "nothing but death."

"I am going to ask something else from you. I have been so accustomed to discuss my opinions and to argue with you that I shall be quite lost after your departure. Will you permit me occasionally to write to you?"

The jewelled fan that she held trembled; the question startled her. Writing seemed to be something different from their easy, pleasant conversations.

"I will promise not to bore you too often," he added.

She looked up at him with a fresh, sweet smile.

"I shall be very pleased with the arrangement," she said, simply. "It will be a pleasure to receive your letters, and a pleasure to answer them; but it will not be like seeing and talking to you."

He sighed as he thought how very different it would be. He would have been better pleased if she had been less frank and more embarrassed—it did not look like love.

"Then you will write to me? Will you tell me what you think and all that you do, just as though you were speaking to me?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied; "and then, when we meet again, it will seem as though there had been no interruption to our friendship."

"Some day, when I think I shall be welcome," said Sir Oscar. "I shall hope to see Norman's Keep. They tell me it is one of the grandest old places in England."

"It is well worth a visit, if you have never seen it," she observed; and then Sir Oscar said no more.

He bade her good-by one evening a little later on.

"My desire to see Norman's Keep is increasing," he said to her, with a smile.

"We are going to Wales for a short time," she announced.

"And I am obliged to go to Scotland on some pressing business," he returned; "but I hope, before the summer is ended, that we shall meet again."

She had not thought that she should miss him so much. There was a great blank in her life, and still her eyes were not opened to the true state of things; though his absence was like a keen, sharp pain to her, she never dreamed that she loved him.

Her heart was warm with memories of him. Nothing could have fostered and increased her love so greatly as going away from the noise of the world into solitude, where she had ample leisure to think of every word he had uttered, every expression she had seen on his face—where she had nothing to do save to indulge in romantic dreams.

Ethel did not look forward; she never thought of the time when Sir Oscar would want a wife of his own—would marry and devote himself to his own household. In her dreams they were always to be as they were then—friends, true, sincere, affectionate friends; they were to write to each other constantly, to meet as often as possible, yet to be friends—nothing more, nothing less.

Lord St. Norman and his family remained for some weeks in Wales, and then they returned to Norman's Keep. Ethel was pleased that her father had decided upon making that their principal residence. Fountayne was full of sad memories for her—memories of the time when "she had been joyful and free from blame."

At Norman's Keep everything was new and strange; the blight of her secret had been on her when she first came thither—revisiting it brought no smart of pain.

They had been there for some few weeks; golden, glorious August was in the height of its loveliness, the corn stood ripe in the meadows, the fruit hung upon the

trees, the haze of sunlight and the smile of summer lay over the land.

One morning Lord St. Norman received a letter which appeared to interest him greatly; he read it and passed it over to his wife. She also read it without comment.

“We had better not mention it to her, I think,” said Lord St. Norman to his wife; “if he takes her by surprise he may win some kind word from her.”

But Lady St. Norman did not agree with him.

“Ethel is proud and sensitive, Leonard; she would wonder why you had not told her—and that very fact might make her angry with him.”

So, after breakfast Lord St. Norman said carelessly,—

“Ethel, an old friend of ours is coming to visit us.”

“Who is that papa?” she asked.

“Sir Oscar Charlcote; he will be here some time to-day, I expect.”

He saw her beautiful face flush deepest crimson, and he smiled again, for he knew that Sir Oscar was coming to ask her to be his wife.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

ETHEL listened to her father's announcement as to the speedy arrival of Sir Oscar Charlcote, but offered no word of reply. A deep, sudden gladness took possession of her. She could not have expressed it in speech; she could not even understand it. It was a sudden, deep, great gladness that stirred the depths of her heart, flushed her face, and brightened her eyes. He was coming. He was not her lover—only her friend—yet all earth and heaven seemed the fairer for his coming. There was joy in her heart such as she had never known before.

“Ethel, will you come with me?” said Lady St. Norman. “I am going over to Denham’s?”

But Ethel did not wish any one to see her face just then; there was a light upon it, which keen eyes would understand, of sudden, irrepressible gladness.

“Pray excuse me, Helen,” she replied; I am going for a walk.”

As she spoke she passed out on to the fragrant lawn and away into the summer woods. She wanted to be alone to think over this great sudden gleam of happiness. Nature smiled on her—the silence that was yet so full of music pleased and soothed her. He was coming, this friend of hers, who made life so much more bright; and all Nature seemed to rejoice with her. No warning came to her that this keen rapture, this sweet, subtle happiness, was love.

She did not look beyond that day. Before the sun had set she would have seen him again, would have heard him speak, would have listened to his voice; her happiness could go no farther. She had not the least thought of wrong; to her it was so settled a matter that she and love

were to be strangers for ever that she never gave a thought to the possibility of its entering her heart. She had settled it so long since with herself that she was to fly from love, that she did not know love had already taken possession of her heart, and was not to be driven away. Her shy, startled, sweet happiness might have told her, but it did not—it might have warned her, but it did not. She went blindfolded to her fate.

The hour she spent that morning in the summer woods was perhaps one of the happiest in her life; it was full of hope and sweetness—a vague, delicious happiness that she did not understand, but which was to bring fatal knowledge to her. All day she looked so bright and blithe that Lord St. Norman smiled to himself at the expression of her face.

“I must say nothing,” he thought to himself; “but there can be no mistake—she is pleased at his coming.”

All day long sweet snatches of half-forgotten songs came to her lips. More than once she found herself relapsing into her old fantastic sway over the household—more than once she found herself wondering at the immense amount of happiness life contained, even when it seemed blighted for ever.

It was significant of her state of mind that for once the dark shadow was lost, or rather was absorbed in the golden light that had fallen over her. The bright face that smiled at her from her mirror amazed her with its glorious loveliness. She chose a dress of pale blue and white, which suited her to perfection. She wore a suite of jewels which Lord St. Norman had given her. She took the greatest pains, the greatest pleasure, in enhancing her loveliness—all to look fair in his eyes—all to look beautiful for the man who was only her friend, though his coming filled her with the utmost happiness and delight.

Sir Oscar had not settled any precise time for his arrival

—he did not reach Norman's Keep until the afternoon; still the day did not seem long to Ethel. The hours had golden wings; he was coming—he would be there before sunset. That thought filled her with patience.

She was standing by the window, talking to Lady St. Norman, when he did arrive—standing in one of those grand statuesque attitudes that always seemed to be natural for her. A servant announced “Sir Oscar Charlcote.” There was no need to ask if she loved him; a crimson blush burned her face—a thousand welcomes brightened in her beautiful eyes—her lips trembled as she greeted him—and the white jewelled hand trembled as she laid it in his. There was no need to ask if she loved him; it was as though a sudden flood of sunlight had fallen round her and dazzled her.

Lady St. Norman smiled.

“She loves him, and she will be happy at last,” she thought to herself.

Ethel murmured some few words as Sir Oscar stood holding her hands in his. She had not heard what he said. She had looked for one moment into his face, and then, for her life had grown suddenly and beautifully complete.

They were not alone—a cousin of Lady St. Norman, Miss Seagrave, was visiting at Norman's Keep; and young Squire Raymond, the wealthy owner of Raymond's Court, was also spending a few days there. He had fallen in love with bright, proud, beautiful Ethel, but he no more dared to say so than he would have dared to claim the throne and crown of England. He only watched her at a distance, and grew crimson and uncomfortable whenever a stray glance of hers fell near him.

They were a very happy party. Refreshments were served to Sir Oscar in the dining-room, and then he had an interview of five minutes' duration with Lord St. Norman, who concluded it by saying,—

“You not only have my consent and my approbation, but the best wishes of my heart are with you ; my dearest hope is for your success.”

Sir Oscar hardly doubted that he would be successful. He had watched Ethel keenly, he had waited patiently, and he believed that she preferred him to any one else.

They sat in the drawing-room—the windows wide open, all the glory of flowers and trees spread before them ; the sweet summer wind that stirred the blossoms so faintly came in laden with perfume ; the sunlight lay warm and golden on the grass, while from gardens and woods came a jubilant sound of songs from the birds.

Miss Seagrave had been singing, and Sir Oscar, watching the beautiful face of the girl he loved, said to himself that he could bear this suspense no longer. Yet she did not know what was shining in his eyes and trembling on his lips.

“I have heard much of the grounds and flowers of Norman’s Keep,” he remarked, suddenly. “I should much like to see them.”

“I am tired,” said Lady St. Norman ; “but you young people could not do better than spend the evening out of doors.”

The hapless young squire thought he saw a chance for himself, and eagerly suggested that they should go at once : but one look from Sir Oscar one almost fierce, impatient frown, so startled him that he turned at once to Miss Seagrave, and begged permission to escort her.

Out into the sweet summer evening—the trees were still, the wind was hushed. A beautiful, holy silence seemed to reign around. The young squire was so greatly distressed by what he had read in Sir Oscar’s face that he became distracted, and when Miss Seagrave asked, “Which do you prefer—the gardens or the pleasure-grounds ?” he answered at random, “Anything—anywhere.”



Sir Oscar and Ethel walked through the flower-garden to Ethel's favorite retreat. They passed the beds of crimson roses, the beautiful heads of which were drooping in the rich wealth of their own sweetness—passed the great sheaves of white lilies; and presently they reached the greensward that led to the lake. The sun was shining on the water, and the white water-lilies were floating on its, deep, tranquil breast. A beautiful drooping cedar stood near it—so large that many people could sit under its shade. There Ethel had her favorite seat, and there now Sir Oscar took his place by her side.

“This is your favorite retreat,” he remarked, in answer to some observation of hers. “I could have fancied you thinking and dreaming in some such picturesque spot. Look at those graceful shadows on the grass; look at the sunlight, how it falls through the borders. And would not one think that the birds were singing for joy? Ah, Miss St. Norman, for many weeks I have been longing for this hour!”

Looking up into his brave, noble face, she saw something there before which her eyes drooped, and her heart beat with happiness that was almost pain.

“We are such near friends and dear friends now,” he continued, “that I wish you would let me call you Ethel—Miss St. Norman seems so formal and ceremonious between friends. May I say Ethel?”

“Yes,” she replied, shyly, “if it pleases you.”

“He is my friend,” she said to herself. “He may surely call me by my Christian name.”

“It pleases me very much,” he confessed. “All the music in the world is comprised in that one word, ‘Ethel.’”

He drew nearer to her, and took the little white hands in his warm grasp.

“Ah, Ethel—sweet Ethel—can you not guess what has brought me here? I could live no longer without looking

at your, face, my beautiful love! My heart was hungry for one sound of your voice—for I love you—I love you as surely no man ever loved before!”

His voice seemed to die on his lips, he found words weak to express the depth of his great passion.

“I loved you, Ethel, the moment that I saw you; but you were so beautiful, proud, you seemed far above me. I thought I had won the highest gift earth had to offer when you promised to be my friend. That did not suffice for long. I have learned to love you, Ethel, with so great an affection, so entire a devotion, that I can no longer live without winning some love from you in return.”

He looked in her face; a beautiful, tender light shone over it—so beautiful that his love conquered him. He bent down and touched the sweet white hand with his lips. Even that did not startle her. She had been unhappy for so long, in this great and glorious joy she for a few moments forgot all else.

She meant no wrong; she did no wrong. Only for a time, for a few fleeting moments, heart and soul were steeped in a trance of delight which was soon to be changed into a reality of sharpest pain.

“I love you so dearly, Ethel,” he continued, “and I am come to lay my life and my love at your feet.”

She made no answer; not yet had she roused herself to the terrible reality. He drew the sweet face nearer to him.

“You are so beautiful, my love,” he said, looking at her with shining eyes; “no flower that blooms is one-half so fair. You are the loveliest, the noblest of women. Ah, Ethel! sweet Ethel! say you love me! Only one word—‘you love me!’”

She was not aroused yet; the golden light had driven the dark shadow away. He drew her beautiful head nearer until it rested on his breast.

“Say you love me, Ethel,” he pursued, “and I shall be prouder than any emperor.”

If she could have died so, poor hapless child, before the keen smart of pain brought her back to the stern reality of her marred and blighted life !

“Ethel,” he resumed, “do not think that I am boasting, but you are my first love, as you will be my last. I have never sought smiles from a fair woman’s face—I never thought of love until I saw you—I have never indulged in what the world calls flirtations ; you are the mistress of my heart and soul, and they oh ! believe me, sweet !—have known no other love, save yours.”

She did believe him. Only a few minutes longer was her happy trance of forgetfulness to last. She believed him, and in that moment she knew how dearly and deeply she loved him. It was like a revelation to her. Suddenly her life seemed to grow complete ; it was love, not friendship—the glorious dower of womanhood was hers at last, the dower at once so full of greatest joy and greatest pain. It was hers, the magic of love. She had thought of it, dreamed of it, wondered over it, and now it was her very own. She had defied it, yet it had gladdened her heart all unknown to herself. It was love that had made the world seem so fair, that had changed the colors of the flowers, and had deepened the light of the sun ; it was love that had made her so light of heart, so fair of face.

He was watching her while these thoughts passed through her mind ; there was a dainty flush on the delicate cheeks, the sensitive lips were parted with a bright, happy smile. She had forgotten poor child, and she was so unutterably happy in her forgetfulness ; there was such contentment in his love, the warm clasp of his strong hand was full of safety and protection, that great, noble heart of his was a haven of sure rest. She was unutterably happy ; and he, looking at her, had no fear.

“ I could not stay away any longer, Ethel,” he said. “ I was afraid to risk all, lest I should lose all ; but you will not be cruel to me—you will not send me from you ? You love me—you will love me, Ethel ? ”

She said something—a few gentle words that were full of music. He could not hear then, but he was content.

“ And I,” he said, “ I will love you for ever, my beautiful queen ! ”

How cruel it was ! How the words stabbed her with sharpest pain ! So hard, so bitter was the pain that a cry he never forgot came from her lips.

“ My beautiful queen ! ” Who had said those words to her before ; The lake, the cedar, the noble face of her lover disappeared. She was standing in the dewy freshness of a summer morning by a gate that led to a stretch of wood, and her young, newly-made husband was by her side. He was covering her hands with kisses and tears. She saw the handsome face—she heard the long-silent voice saying ; “ For I love you so dearly, my beautiful queen ! ” Ah ! dear Heaven ! that even for one happy moment she could forget ! She stood up with a despairing cry—her beautiful young face grew ghastly in her pallor.

“ I had forgotten ! ” she moaned. “ Ah ! Heaven pardon me—I had forgotten ! ”

Then the anguish of her pain became too strong for her, and, turning from him, with a cry she fell on her face on the long, cool grass.

He was frightened for her—not for himself. He felt sure that she loved him—that he should win her—that she would be his wife ; but he fancied that he had startled her—that he had been too abrupt. Yet why should she look so despairing ? What had she forgotten ?

He went to her, and raised her. As he turned her

face to the sunlight, he was startled by its look of pale, settled despair. He held her in his arms, he kissed her white lips.

"My darling," he said, "forgive me. I have startled you, Ethel. I shall never pardon myself, if I have frightened you."

His voice seemed to recall her to herself—a deadly shudder passed over her frame. Sir Oscar grew alarmed.

"Ethel, my darling, what is the matter? I did not think I should startle you so greatly."

"It is not that," she said, in a low voice—"I had forgotten."

How was she to tell him? She grew faint and sick with despair. How was she to tell him that she, so young, was married already, and that the husband she had wedded in such secrecy and haste was a common felon? Twice her white lips opened, but all sound died upon them.

"I am a rough soldier," said Sir Oscar, "and I have frightened you. I am too brusque, too abrupt. Ethel, forgive me; tell me you are not angry—tell me that you will be my wife."

She raised her eyes to his face, and their sorrow touched him. He was about to plead more earnestly, more passionately, when the sound of approaching footsteps arrested the words on his lips.

Squire Raymond and Miss Seagrave were coming toward them.

"Ethel," he said, hurriedly, "you must give me an answer. I shall leave my heart, my hope, my life, my love in your sweet hands; think of what I have said, and tomorrow I will come to you to know my fate."

She turned away from him; not to save her life could she have uttered one word. He was perplexed and bewildered, unable to think what had so suddenly overcome her.

“You will not care to meet these people,” he said—“I will go to them.”

Sir Oscar joined the newcomers, and Ethel returned to the house.

“Is Miss St. Norman going in?” asked the squire, in a tone of great disappointment. “I thought we were going round the grounds.”

“Miss St. Norman is tired,” explained Sir Oscar; and that excuse served as a pretext for her absence during the evening.

Sir Oscar, although distressed and anxious, tried to make the best of matters, and returned to the drawing-room. Lord St. Norman saw the anxious expression of his face, but was too well bred to ask any questions. So the evening passed slowly. Ethel excused herself from appearing by sending a message to Lady St. Norman.

She could not have met strangers on that evening; she could keep up appearances no longer; she must be alone in her sorrow, as she had been in her joy. She could not have looked upon her father’s face, nor endured the sound of her lover’s voice—she must bear the smart of her pain alone. She locked her door, saying to herself that she could not permit any one to see her in this, the supreme hour of her desolation. She took off the pretty dress that had been so great a source of pleasure to her, she took off the pearls that had added to her beauty, all in a dumb, mechanical way that was pitiful to see. Then she stood like one who, by some keen and terrible blow, had been rendered powerless. Her brain whirled, her thoughts were all chaos; she could not collect them. She stood firm, while the first shock of grief passed over her, as a rock stands firm beneath the shock of angry waves.

How blind she had been—how foolish not to see that the very danger she had steeled herself against was so near her! How blind and foolish she was to mistake love for

friendship ! And she did love him, with the love that was her doom. All through the long months that love had grown upon her, unconsciously to herself ; it had taken such complete possession of her heart, soul, and mind, that she had forgotten everything else, and had been blind to all danger.

It was so cruel, so hard. No wonder she clasped her hands, and fell on her knees with a great, voiceless sob, trying to pray, yet finding no words in which to express herself—trying to ask mercy from Heaven, yet not able to remember words in which to ask it.

It was so terribly hard, so bitterly cruel. She had not thought to do much harm. She loved her father, and had loathed the idea of a second marriage for him. To prevent that marriage she had resolved to lessen his esteem for Helen Digby. The tempter had found her out, and had preyed upon her weakness. She had been persuaded, flattered into this fatal marriage ; she had been more reckless than a careless child, and the punishment of her sin was great and terrible to bear. Young, beautiful, and beloved, she was bound in chains that must hamper her while life lasted. She had weakly yielded to persuasion and flattery ; the result was that her whole life had been marred and blighted.

She loved Sir Oscar. She saw and understood it all now that it was too late—all her recent peace and happiness had arisen from the sweet, unconscious dawn of love. He had asked her to be his wife ; and she might have been so happy with him—she could imagine no lot in life happier. Earth would have been like Paradise could she have lived by his side. Before her stretched out the long years that might have been gladdened by his love, wherein she might have been his happy, honored, beloved wife. She might have borne his name, have stood side by side with him in all the struggles of the world ; she might have

died holding his hands, comforted by his love and tenderness. All the joy, the brightness, the happiness, the love that might have been hers, passed in review before her.

“ My love, my love,” she moaned ; “ I could have been so happy with you ! ”

If she could but go to him on the morrow and say : “ I love you, Oscar—I will be your wife ! ” how he would clasp her in his arms and cover her face with kisses—how his great heart would throb with happiness !

Before her again stretched out the long years in which though she loved him, she must see him no more—the long years during which she must live her solitary, desolate, lonely life, unrelieved by the love of husband or child—the years that must bring her at last to a solitary death. She clinched her hands, and bit her lips to keep herself from cursing the man who had brought such ruin and desolation on her young life.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

ETHEL was standing at her window when the great hall clock sounded twelve. She was unable to sleep, unable to rest. The room, large and sumptuous as it was, seemed too small for her to breathe in. She had opened the window and stood looking out on the sweet, calm, dewy night.

It was all so calm and fair, contrasting with the hot, passionate bitterness of her tortured heart. The moon was shining on the trees, throwing quaint, graceful shadows on the grass; the flowers, even in sleep, gave her their sweetest odors; the birds were all at rest.

“Heaven meant the world to be happy,” she said to herself, “or it would not be so fair. I am young,” she moaned, “and I have but one life to live—how shall I bear that to be ruined and blighted?”

As she stood there, the night wind sighing around her and making wild music in the trees, there came to her a subtle, terrible temptation—one that shook her, that bewildered her,—a temptation so gracefully disguised that it seemed almost like the prompting of a good thought.

Why should she be always miserable? Why should she make Sir Oscar wretched? Surely that miserable marriage could never be binding. Laurie Carrington had duped and deceived her; he had tempted her by the most cruel arts; he had played upon her weakness; he had tricked her; he had married her under a false name; he had left her on her wedding-day, and she had never seen him or heard of him since. Surely the tie could not be binding—she could not be, in very truth, the wife of the criminal who had lured her to her ruin. But, supposing she was

—to take the worst view possible—his wife before Heaven—in all probability, the secret of that terrible marriage would never be known. He might die abroad. A hundred things might happen to him. It was not probable that he would ever claim her. He would not dare to do so; even if he were so disposed he could not find her. Should he hear of Lady Charlcote, he would never imagine her to be his lost wife. Why not be happy herself, and make Sir Oscar happy too? Who would ever know? What possible harm could it do? She had suffered enough for that sin and folly of her youth—she did not wish to suffer any more. Surely now she might consider herself free. Other people had sinned far more, yet in the end had been happy—why should not she?

She would. She did not see the necessity of waiting any longer in this dreary uncertainty. She would take her fate into her own hands. She would bury her secret, and marry Sir Oscar.

So she decided; and a curious kind of relief came to her. She could tell him in the morning something that would account for her agitation. She would bury this hateful secret, and marry him, and then she would be happy. If there were any danger in England, she felt quite sure that she could persuade Sir Oscar to live abroad. Her secret would never be known—why blight the remainder of her life? She would make her father happy; Helen would be pleased; and Sir Oscar—a great rush of warm happiness filled her heart as she thought of him and what he would say.

So she decided—the sweet, subtle temptation mastered her for the time.

“It cannot be very wrong,” she repeated to herself, piteously. “I have suffered enough.”

She stood watching the glimmer of the stars, thinking of a hundred things—how she would see Sir Oscar on the

morrow—how her father would kiss and bless her—of the pomp of the wedding and the happiness of being Sir Oscar's wife ; and as she mused the glimmer of the stars carried her mind to the fair, pure world above them. If she did this deed, would there ever be any place for her there ? Could she go to that bright, pure land where angels rejoice ? She knew in the depth of her heart that all the arguments she had used to herself were so many flimsy sophistries ; that, though he had been brought to justice, she was the lawful wife of the man she had married secretly, and that, being his lawful wife, no earthly power could free her from him ; she knew that, disguise it as she might, if she did this deed it would be a deadly sin.

“ He is worthy of a better fate,” she sighed, “ than to be deceived as I should deceive him if I married him now. No, it must not be.”

The temptation was strong, subtle and sweet, but she must trample it under her feet as would to Heaven she had done that temptation of revenge years ago.

“ Gordon abides by what Gordon has done.” She had sinned, she must suffer. She would not increase her sin ; she bowed her head and prayed Heaven to pardon her because for a few moments she had yielded to such a thought. There was nothing for it but to endure to the end—to die hard, but in dying to make no sign. A hero loved her, she must make herself worthy of a hero's love—that would be by brave endurance, not by weakly yielding to a strong temptation.

It was past now. She had trampled it under foot, and there was an end of it. “ I thank Heaven,” said Ethel, reverently, “ that I did not yield.”

She must see Sir Oscar on the morrow, and must tell him that there was no hope. She had imagined at first that she must tell him her secret, but she had altered her mind. She could not do so. He would think her capri-

cious, changeable, vain, fitful, weak—better that, better any thing, than that he should know her to be the wife of a common forger—than that he should know this story of how she had married in secret and in haste. She must tell him that she declined his offer, he was so generous, so kind, so noble, he would never ask her why. She must send him away—and with him would go the last faint gleam of happiness that she would ever know.

She raised her face to the skies, repeating the words, "I must send him away;" and then there came to her a picture of the years as they would be when he was gone—cold, dreary, desolate, unrelieved by the sight of his face or the sound of his voice—loveless, joyless years, and then death—death, without his hands to clasp hers, without his love to comfort her—death, however, with the knowledge that she had borne bravely the punishment of her sin, and had not been guilty of criminal weakness. She bowed her beautiful head in the starlight, hiding her fair, colorless face in her hands.

"With Heaven's help," she said, "I will bear my punishment bravely, patiently, and give up, renounce forever, my love;" and she adhered to her determination unbrokenly.

The light of the stars was fading then, and faint pearly tints, as of the early dawn, came into the sky. She never thought of rest; she had a task before her—to say farewell to this man whom so unconsciously she had grown to love with all her heart. She would have all the remainder of her life to rest; now she must think of him, and how to spare him pain. The pearly tints became rose-colored, the glorious sun rose in the east, the heavens were a sheet of flame, the dew shone on the flowers, and in the long, thick grass, the birds began to sing, but still she sat, her fair face buried in her hands, thinking of how best to spare Sir Oscar pain.

As to herself, she would try to be brave, to endure, to

be patient and strong, to bear the burden of the joyless years until they ended in death ; with him whom she loved so tenderly it would be otherwise. Her heart ached with womanly pity for him.

The full morning came at last ; she heard the stir of the busy household, and she knew that her long night-watch was over. In after years she often thought that she had said adieu to her youth and all its brightness during that sad terrible night.

The fair, colorless face bore traces of her watch—the dainty, exquisite bloom had left it, the light that only yesterday had made her so fair was all gone. A bright, hopeful girl had looked in that mirror yesterday—now it reflected the sad, weary face of a sorrowful woman.

She had to say “good-by” to him within twelve hours. She knew that she must not see him again ; it would be neither prudent nor wise. She could not hope in after years to renew her friendship with him. That friendship had been a delusion ; there must be no more of it. The “good-by” must be final. “And when I have said it,” she thought to herself, “I shall have said good-by to life. There will remain for me nothing save through the long years to endure a living death.”

So dawned the day for which Sir Oscar Charlcote had waited so long and had wished so ardently. He hailed it as the day that would give him his heart’s desire. What the close of it was to him, the sorrow of long years told.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ETHEL was undecided as to how to meet Sir Oscar. It was useless to send excuses or make delays—the task must be accomplished. She thought of going down to breakfast, and then walking out with him; but, when she rose from her seat to make the necessary change in her dress, her limbs trembled so that she could not stand. She could not go down to breakfast and talk and laugh with those around her—she, with her strength all gone. She decided at last to write a note to him. It said simply,—

“DEAR SIR OSCAR: I do not feel well enough to go down to breakfast to-day. Will you meet me in an hour’s time by the lakeside? I have something very important to say to you.”

The maid to whom she intrusted the note smiled with delight. She little guessed the depth of despair in the heart of the hapless girl who had written it. Sir Oscar did not smile as he read. He knew Ethel so well—he understood her pride, her delicate reserve, her modesty, her graceful reticence so well—that to him this little note augured ill. The “something” she had to say puzzled him—he would not even think that she was about to reject him.

“I am sure she likes me,” he said to himself. “She is so proud that, if she did not love me, she would never have allowed me to kiss her hand—she would have dismissed me with a word. It must be some shy, girlish idea.”

Lady St. Norman did not feel in the least degree anxious about Ethel’s absence from the breakfast table.

“She likes to keep her lover in suspense,” Lady St. Norman told her husband ; and he laughed at the idea.

“When a proud girl like Ethel does give up her liberty,” he said, “I suppose the happy lover pays dearly for it.”

He never dreamed that the shadow which had so long darkened his daughter’s life was to become perpetual gloom. Sir Oscar went to his appointment ; he was impatient to know what Ethel had to say to him. He saw her in the distance, sitting under the shade of the large cedar-tree, and his heart beat as he drew near her. His hope failed when she raised her colorless face to his.

“My dearest Ethel,” he said, “I have hastened to obey your wish, I hope you have good news for me—you have been thinking of what I have said, and you will promise to be my wife ? ”

He sat down by her side ; he saw on her fair face the traces of her long night-watch, and he wondered silently what she was about to say.

“If there was any prayer I could urge that I have not urged already,” he said, “I would use it, Ethel. I left my life and my love in your hands ; you will give me something in return for them ? ”

“I sent for you, Sir Oscar,” returned Ethel, “to tell you that I am grateful for your love—for your kindness—but that I can never be your wife.”

Her voice was so altered that he hardly recognized it ; and the music seemed to have died out of it.

“My dearest Ethel, that is a neat little speech—one that you have evidently learned by heart ; but I refuse for one moment to believe that you mean it or that you intend to be so cruel to me ; you could not.”

“I am sorry,” she faltered, “but indeed it is true, I cannot marry you Sir Oscar.”

Still he did not believe ; it was shyness, it was coyness,

it was a desire to tease him—it could not be true. He knelt before her as one who sued humbly for the favor of a queen; he took the white cold hands in his, and looked up into the exquisite face.

“You cannot mean it, Ethel. See, dearest, I kneel to you. Pray do not send me away from you. You do not know how dearly I love you. If you were to tell me to die for you, I would do so with a smile on my lips; but I cannot leave you Ethel. There are some things beyond a man’s strength; that is beyond mine. Let death come if needs must, but not life without you!”

“I cannot marry you, Sir Oscar,” she repeated—and something in the wistful anguish of her face told him the words were true.

“Ethel,” he asked, “do you love me?”

She raised her beautiful eyes slowly to his, and in their shadowed depths he read nothing but despair.

“Yes,” she replied, “I love you. I might say ‘No,’ I might speak falsely, I might make some evasive answer, but it would be useless, quite useless. I love you, Sir Oscar, but I can never be your wife.”

His face flushed as he listened to her; the hapless expression of her face, the dreary sound of her voice filled him with dismay.

“Ethel,” he said, gently, “will you answer me one question? When a man has to die, he may ask for a reason, Tell me—do you love any one else?”

“No,” she replied, sadly “I do not.”

“Have you ever loved any one else?”

“No,” she answered, earnestly—“never in all my life.”

“Yet you cannot marry me! Oh, Ethel, you are saying it to try me! You cannot be in earnest, my beautiful love!”

“It is true, Sir Oscar,” said the girl. “I love you



alone of all the world. I shall never love any one else, let me live as long as I may."

He looked thoughtfully at her.

"Ethel, you know that Lord St. Norman is not only favorable to our marriage, but he is desirous of it."

"I know that," she said.

"There can be no objection on that score. If your father were unwilling, however dearly I might love you, I would not urge my suit—honor would forbid it; but he is anxious for our marriage, Ethel. I am rich enough to be able to give you all the splendor and luxury your heart can desire. I cannot, look which way I will, find any grounds for your refusal to marry me."

"It is not that I will not," she said, sadly. "You do not understand, Sir Oscar—I cannot. It is hard for me for I love you."

"Then, darling, be my wife; after all it can be but a fancied scruple—nothing more."

The saddest smile that ever came over woman's lips crossed hers.

"I would to Heaven it were fancy—it is a terrible reality. Sir Oscar I love you, but I can never be your wife because I have a secret in my life."

"A secret, Ethel!" he repeated. He looked at the pale, beautiful face, with its sad, sweet lips and tender eyes. "I should not care, my darling, if you had five hundred! Oh, Ethel, trust me; you are young and inexperienced, and what you deem of moment may be nothing after all. I am quite sure of one thing—there can be nothing in your beautiful, pure young life to unfit you to be my wife."

"Thank you for your generous trust in me," she responded; "but my secret will prevent my marrying you."

"Will you trust me with it?" he asked, anxiously.

“Not that I would know it from idle curiosity, but that I might help you, Ethel.”

“You cannot help me. I must bear my sorrow alone until I die. I cling to your esteem. I cannot tell you my secret. Be generous, and do not ask me to do so.”

“I would stake my existence on your goodness, Ethel. If you yourself told me, I would not believe that you had done wrong. I would never believe but that you are the purest and best, even as you are the most beautiful of women.”

“That depends on what you call wrong. I cannot tell you what I did. I will not tell you my secret. I did not do wrong willingly. I was young, foolish, blind.” Her voice died away, and a deep, bitter sob came from her lips.

“Ethel, my darling, if you would but trust me!” he cried.

“I do trust you, but I cannot tell you my secret. I can never be your wife, Sir Oscar. The gulf between us is one that nothing can bridge over. It is deeper and darker than death.”

“Then, Ethel,” he demanded, in a voice full of anguish, “do you mean that I, with my heart and soul full of love for you—with my whole life depending on you—do you mean that I am to go away from you, and never see you again?”

The passion in his voice startled her. She laid her white hand on his.

“I mean it, dear,” she said, gently; “it must be so—it cannot be helped.”

“Not even if it breaks my heart, Ethel?”

“Not if it breaks your heart, and mine,” she answered; “we must part, and it will be unwise for us ever to meet again.”

He buried his face in the soft silken folds of her dress,

and a silence that was full of pain fell over them. When he raised his face again it was colorless as her own, with great lines of pain round the firm lips.

“How cruel women are !” he cried. “The fairest among them are more cruel than the boy who cages a bird and then tortures it to death. Ethel, you knew that I loved you, and you took my heart in your hands only to break it. Oh, cruel—cruel and cold !”

“Nay, Oscar,” she interrupted. “I stand on the threshold of a parting that will be to both of us more bitter than death ; believe me, on my word, I did not think of love. I did not know you loved me, I did not know that I loved you ; I thought that we were only dear, true friends. I never meant to love any one—the knowledge came on me as a shock or a terrible surprise ; but it came too late. You believe me, Oscar, do you not ?”

“My poor child, my poor Ethel, forgive me if I seemed to upbraid you. Darling, I would rather love you, and love you in vain, than win the greatest affection from any one else. But, Ethel, this secret of yours—does Lord St. Norman know it ?”

She looked at him, her sweet face white with terror.

“No,” she replied, quickly ; “and you must not lead him to suppose that there is one, Oscar. He will think I am proud and cold of heart ; he must think so—better anything than that he should suspect the truth.”

“I wish you would trust me,” he said. “This is not the age of mystery or romance ; what secret can a fair young life like yours hold, Ethel, which should prevent your being happy ?”

She, listening to him, buried her face in her hands, weeping loudly, and crying that it was all her fault—all her fault—and that she was most bitterly punished for her sin.

Ethel was the first to recover herself. Sir Oscar was

like one stunned by a sudden blow. Ethel's words were so unexpected that for a time they had unmanned him. She laid her hands on his, and looked at him.

"Heaven knows ;" she said, "that I would have borne anything rather than have inflicted this pain upon you. I did not mean it. Will you forgive me? The only pleasant memory I can carry with me through life is that you have forgiven me !"

"I have nothing to forgive," he returned, gently. "I have told you, Ethel that I would rather be unhappy with your love than happy with the truest affection of another. You will send me from you, then, Ethel ?"

"I must, there is no alternative. I send you from me in time, that I may meet you in eternity. I might have deceived you, and done wrong ; but then there would have been no heaven for me. I shall bear the pain of my life as bravely as I can."

"You are so good, Ethel," he moaned. "I am sure you have done no wrong." And then he looked at her white face. "What am I to do, Ethel? How am I to bear my life ?"

She thought of his own words in India, and longed to repeat them.

"I must bear it, too," he continued ; "but it is the heaviest sorrow that man ever had to bear. Ethel, do you mean that I am to go back to Lord St. Norman, tell him that I have failed, and then go away without the least gleam of hope? Do you mean that ?"

"There is no hope," she replied ; "and I shall be grateful to you if you will tell my father. He will be angry and disappointed, but it cannot be helped."

"I will do that, or anything else for you. And this is the last time, Ethel, that I am to look into your beautiful face and hold your hand in mine—the last time I am to whisper words to you ?"

“Yes, it is the last time,” she answered.

“Ethel,” he said, suddenly ; “make me one promise—that if ever you want help you will send for me. I will not ask again what your secret is—if you could you would tell me. But, if ever there comes a time when I can help you—when a strong right arm, an earnest will, a devoted heart may be of service to you—will you send for me ?”

“I will,” she said.

“Another request, my darling—if I lie dying and send for you, will you come to bid me farewell ?”

“Without fail,” she promised.

“May I write to you, Ethel,” he asked—“not often, but sometimes—so that I may hear from yourself that you are living and well ?”

“It will be better not. Try to forget me, dear—try even, if you can, to find some one else more worthy of your great and generous love ; try to forget me, for I can never be your wife, and we two must henceforth be as strangers.”

As she said the words he saw her face grow paler, and he knew that her strength was fast failing her. The greatest kindness that he could do for her would be to shorten this terrible parting and to leave her. The same idea seemed to strike Ethel. She held out her hand to him.

“Oscar,” she said, gently, “say good-by to me here and now.”

He clasped her in his arms, and she did not shrink from him—it was the last caress, sad and solemn as though she lay on her deathbed and he had come to say farewell.

“Good-by, my love—my wife that should have been ; my dear and only love, good-by.”

He kissed the white lips, not once but a hundred times Strong man as he was, tears fell from his eyes.

“Ethel, say one kind word to me, that I may take it with me through the long years to comfort me.”

She bent her sweet face near his.

"I love you, Oscar," she whispered; "good-by—Heaven bless you and comfort you; good-by."

Gently and tenderly he unclasped her arms from his neck and placed her on the pretty rustic seat; once more he kissed her lips, once more he said "good-by, my love—good-by," and then, with an effort so great that it seemed to rend his heart, he turned away and left her.

He did not look back; if he had done so he must have returned to her again—and that his reason and judgment opposed. He walked with rapid footsteps toward the house, and was soon lost to sight. She watched him until his tall figure had disappeared between the trees.

"Good-by, my love, good-by," she repeated, with white lips; and then, drawing her shawl around her, she sat perfectly still.

It seemed to her that she was passing through the bitterness of death. Hour after hour sped on, and still she sat there, unable to move, dreading the time when she must look life in the face again.

"If I could but die here," she said to herself; "if Heaven would but take pity on me, and send me eternal rest!"

How could she go back through the sunlight to the house? How could she meet people, talk to them, smile on them? How could she play her part in the daily round of life while her heart was aching with terrible pain? If she could but sit there in silence until death came and took her from her sorrow.

She could not find relief in tears, as some would have done; her grief lay too deep for that. She had said good-by to him, her only love; there was nothing now but patient endurance. Life could give her no greater sorrow, and it held no more joy; it was all over—all ended.

As she sat there in the glow of the sunshine, her short,

sad life passed in review before her—the happy, careless days, when her graceful, fantastic, imperious rule at Fountain had filled the whole house with sunshine, and her own heart with delight; the days when she had rejoiced in her father's love, happy and bright as the birds and the butterflies, desiring nothing beyond it; the darker time, when pride, anger, and revenge had taken possession of her—the short, fleeting fancy that had ended so terribly and so tragically.

“There is no excuse for me,” she moaned—“no excuse; but was ever human being more hardly punished for their sin?”

What great, unutterable happiness had been offered to her, which she had been compelled to put aside! She might have been the happiest woman living. She might have been Sir Oscar's wife. All the love, the joy, the happiness that life holds might have been hers, but she had been obliged to put it from her and think of it no more. She raised her white, despairing face to the smiling heavens.

“I have deserved it all,” she said; “but I am hardly punished for my sin.”

It was noon before she left the shade of the cedar-tree and returned to the house. Lady St. Norman saw her walking across the lawn, and she wondered why she walked so slowly and so sadly. She looked at her face—it was colorless, with lines of pain all around the sweet, trembling lips. Lady St. Norman watched her for some time in silence.

“Ethel is ill,” she said to herself; and she went out to meet her.

She said no word when she came near her—there was something in Ethel's face which forbade speech—but she went up to her room with her, and closed the door. Then, with open arms, she turned to her stepdaughter.

"Ethel," she said, gently, "what is it?" And Ethel clasping her white arms round the kindly neck, hid her face on Helen's breast.

"What is it, my dear?" asked Lady St. Norman. She felt Ethel shivering like one extremely cold.

"Helen," said the faint, broken voice, "you were always good to me—always kind to me—shield me now a little. Stand between me and the world."

"I will," promised Lady St. Norman; "tell me one thing, Ethel. Have you refused Sir Oscar?"

"Yes," she replied; "I have refused him, and he is gone."

And then, without another word, Lady St. Norman laid Ethel down upon her bed.

"Try to sleep, my dear," she said: "your face is flushed, and your eyes burn. Would it relieve you—would you like to tell me why you have refused Sir Oscar? I thought you loved him."

The girl turned from her with a weary sigh.

"Do not ask me to do so, Helen. You have always been kind to me; but the greatest kindness you can do from this time forth will be never to mention his name again;" and Ethel turned from the kindly face bent over her—turned from the sunlight and closed her eyes, like one tired of life.

Lady St. Norman was considerate. She saw that Ethel was harassed by some secret sorrow, and though she was both surprised and puzzled, she did not comment upon it. With a grave, anxious look on her face she went down to Lord St. Norman. She found him alone, and certainly, from the expression of his countenance, looking not well pleased.

"Helen," he said, "I cannot understand this. Ethel **has** refused Sir Oscar, and he has gone away. I thought



she liked him. How difficult she is to please ! I cannot tell you how annoyed I am."

It was the mission of this fair gentlewoman to be a peace-maker. With a gentle, caressing touch she laid her hand on her husband's shoulder.

"I know, Leonard," she said ; "I am very sorry ; but I want to speak to you about Ethel. Do not be angry with her—she is not happy."

"She is never likely to be," asserted his lordship, angrily. "I wonder whom she would really think good enough for her ?"

"Do you know what my idea is, Leonard ?"

"No," he replied, softened by the sweetness of his wife's voice and the grace of her manner. "It is a sensible idea, I am sure !"

"I believe that Ethel, in spite of all her beauty and pride, has had some great sorrow in her life."

"What sorrow could she have unknown to us?" he asked.

"I cannot tell. She is proud and reserved, you know. Perhaps she has liked some one very much who has not cared for her ; she is not happy ; and I think that must be the cause. Do not say anything to her, Leonard. Leave her to me."

He did not like the idea of his beautiful Ethel's being unhappy.

"I shall not say anything to her, Helen," he said. "You must manage her as you can. You understand her better than I do."

And when, after the lapse of a few days, Lord St. Norman saw his daughter again, he said no word to her of Sir Oscar ; nor when he heard that Sir Oscar Charlote had left England did he tell her about it.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

TEN years had passed since the fatal summer morning when Ethel Gordon had gone out to her fate—ten long years—and during the course of them she had never heard one word of or from Laurie Carrington. She did not know whether he was alive or dead; all she did know was that she was bound for life in chains, the weight of which grew heavier day by day. She did not want to hear from him. She did not care where he was, nor what he was doing. He had duped her more cruelly than ever woman had been duped before. She detested his name, she loathed his memory; but across that detestation and loathing came the memory of the great, passionate love he had borne her, and it softened her heart in some slight degree. She never expected to hear of him again. It was ten years since that fatal morning. He might be living or he might be dead—she should never know: but her life would be passed in suspense. She was not afraid of his finding her. “If he had wanted to find me,” she said to herself, “he would have managed it before now.”

It was eight years since the summer morning when she had said farewell to her lover. During all that time she had never heard from him. His name was occasionally mentioned in society, and strangers stated that he had gone to Africa. She heard of his travelling in Egypt and the Holy Land. She also heard people wondering why he did not return to England and settle at home. But from himself she had no word.

Ten years had gradually changed Ethel. She was a

graceful, lovely girl when she went to St. Ina's; now at twenty-eight she was in the pride of her magnificent womanhood. Sorrow had done for her what nothing else could have done—it had refined and increased her beauty; the glorious eyes were no longer bright with happy laughter, but in their wondrous depths lay something that made one long to look at them again and again. The exquisite face had never regained its dainty bloom, but the beauty of it was peerless—the sad, sweet lips, the tender, thoughtful eyes, were more lovely than ever. The graceful figure had reached its full perfection; there was a queenly dignity about Ethel, a sweet, tender gravity that could come only from sorrow patiently borne. Hers was the peerless beauty of perfect womanhood—a royal dower of grace—and she wore her sorrow like a diadem.

She had suffered long and keenly after Sir Oscar went away, and then she learned more than ever to value Lady St. Norman's love and kindness. Helen shielded her from the world; she saw that the girl's heart was bruised, and she did her best to comfort her. She stood between her and all impertinent comment, all curious questions—she shielded her from remark, she bore patiently with her long hours of weary abstraction and depression. Time passed on, and her tender kindness never failed. Lord St. Norman concealed his disappointment as well as he could; it was owing to his wife's gentle admonition that he never showed it to Ethel.

For some years she had declined going to London during the season, and, finding that the idea of it only gave her pain, Lord St. Norman ceased to mention it. It became a settled thing that, when Lord and Lady St. Norman went to town, she should remain at Norman's Keep. She so constantly refused all invitations, that after a time people ceased to invite her. She was obliged to meet the society that her father gathered around him, but it soon

became an understood thing that Miss St. Norman "never went anywhere,"

Of course, people talked; those who remembered her during her first brilliant season in London were astonished that she should never return to increase her triumphs. The great people of the great world regretted the beautiful Miss St. Norman. Those who had been her rivals wondered at her; people asked each other why she, who was so young and so beautiful, had given up the pleasures of the world, and had buried herself in the country. For the first year or two many invitations were sent to her, but she refused them all.

"You should try to enjoy life, Ethel," said Lady St. Norman to her one day; and Ethel, looking at her with sad, sweet eyes, said, simply,—

"What people call life, ended for me long ago, Helen."

It seemed like it. All her girlish vivacity had disappeared; a sweet, patient gravity that did not belong to her years had taken its place. She offered no murmur, she uttered no regret; she seemed like one who stood aside while life with all its crowd of events passed by her. There could come no more change for her. Suns rose and set, tides ebbed and flowed, the seasons came and went, but all that there was left for her to do was to wait in patience until the end came. Never more would her heart stir even faintly with hope—never more would joy or happiness still her pulse or flush her face; it was all over, and she was waiting for the end.

How long would it be in coming? How many dreary years must pass first? For, though her sorrow was great, she had the gifts of strength and health. She asked herself sometimes how much longer these would last, and how far off the longed-for end could be. It might not come for years and years. She pictured the years as they spread out in dreary length before her. They would be

spent at Norman's Keep—she would never care to leave it again ; and each year would be as the last—each would be dreary, hopeless, and desolate. So slowly and surely would ebb away the life that might, but for her own folly, have been so bright and joyous.

Cheerfully she did all the little duties that fell to her lot—she went to the village to assist the poor and sick ; and then people looked at the beautiful, saddened face, and wondered why Miss St. Norman was different from any one else.

While the Sabbath bells were chiming, she walked with Lord St. Norman to the grand old parish church. Those who saw her then never forgot her—the beautiful, listless, weary face, the sad eyes that always seemed to be looking so far away, the sweet lips that were so rarely parted to smile.

She sat in the old church, while the sun streamed through the windows and the children's voices were raised in song ; but those who saw her there said she looked more like the marble statue of a saint than like a living woman.

If she heard that any of the villagers were in trouble, she never rested until she had done her best to comfort them, but she avoided all scenes of gayety and amusement. Lady St. Norman was distressed to see her turn one day faint and shuddering from the merry chimes of wedding-bells, yet neither Lord St. Norman nor his wife ever asked what had caused the change in her.

They were speaking of her one evening, when Lord St. Norman said,—

“ I am grievously disappointed in my daughter—she is so changed, Helen. She used to be bright and lively ; her laugh was free and unrestrained. She was the pleasantest, sweetest girl you can imagine—even her pride, her petulance, her odd caprices, had a charm of their own—she had a quick word for every one ; now her pride, her

vivacity, her girlishness seem all to have died together. I cannot imagine what has changed her."

"Do you think," asked Helen, "that she has grieved about our marriage?"

"Only at first. When I came back from Austria, she told me that she hoped we should be married soon, you were so kind to her. She loves you very much now, Helen."

"Yes," agreed Lady St. Norman, "she loves me now."

"It is one of those cases," observed her husband, "where the womanhood does not carry out the promises of youth. No one could be more beautiful than Ethel. Her face is exquisite, her figure is grace and symmetry itself, but her constant depression and melancholy render her beauty useless to her, and I see no hope now of rousing her."

"Nor do I," said Helen. "I do not think she will ever alter."

"If she would but fall in love, and marry, as other girls do!" said Lord St. Norman, with a sigh.

"I think," returned Helen, gravely, "that she has fallen in love, but I do not think she will ever marry."

So, even by those nearest and dearest to her, by those who loved her best, Ethel's case was considered hopeless.

Time passed on, and nothing broke the monotonous calm. The beautiful Miss St. Norman was looked upon as some one different from the rest of the world. Some said she was melancholy—others that she was religious—others that she was peculiar—but no one guessed the truth, that she was one of the most unhappy women that ever lived,

## CHAPTER XL.

“ANOTHER summer day,” said Ethel to herself—“twelve hours of warm, sultry sun, and then night—another day of endurance, uncheered by hope.”

She sat in the pretty morning-room at Fountayne drawing; a sketch lay before her, and she was copying it, but the pencil had fallen from her hand. She was leaning back in her chair; her eyes with a far-off, dreamy expression, lingered on the trees and flowers, a listless, weary expression was on her beautiful face, as of one who was tired beyond all power of words to tell. The summer sun that rose so warm and brilliant brought no change for her—brought her no ray of hope, no gleam of light, no faint star of happiness—nothing but unchanged, unchangeable gloom.

As she sat there Lady St. Norman entered the room. A faint gleam deepened in the violet eyes as they turned slowly to welcome her.

Helen went up to her with the air of one who has an unwelcome mission. She threw one arm caressingly around the neck of the girl and bent over her.

“Ethel,” she said, “I know you will not like what I have come to say to you.”

Not the faintest light of interest or curiosity came into her eyes.

“What is it, Helen? Tell me; I neither like nor dislike anything.”

“I am afraid that is true,” said Lady St. Norman; “but, Ethel, it should not be. If you could see the weary, listless expression on your face, the tired look of your eyes! Oh, my darling child, why should it be so? Why should you not be bright, blithe, and gay?”

"Because I am tired," replied the girl. "But, Helen, you did not come to discuss my looks. What is it that you know I shall not like to hear?"

"Your father insists upon our acceptance of this invitation to Holmedale Park. We shall be compelled to go."

"He does not include me, Helen; he is speaking only of you and himself. Why should I go to Holmedale?"

"I am afraid, darling, he does include you. He has been very patient, Ethel—you must remember that; for some years he has allowed you to remain at home and do as you would in every way."

"Why does he wish to alter that now?" asked Ethel, but there was no impatience in her voice, no interest.

"It would require a long explanation to tell you why," replied Lady St. Norman. "There is some grand political combination on foot, and our party want to win Lord Leighton to their side, and he is at present wavering in the balance. He has invited us all to visit him, and your name was especially mentioned, as his only daughter, Clarice Leighton is at home, and he wishes you to know her. Ethel, I have never asked you to give up your own wishes or your own inclination before, but I do so now. It will please your father, and if you can please him, do."

"I will go," agreed Ethel. "It does not matter much where one is. I will go to please him."

"And a little to please yourself," added Lady St. Norman, with a smile. "Confess, now, that it will be pleasant to meet nice people and have a little enjoyment."

"I cannot see any prospect of pleasure, Helen; but I will go, as I would do anything else in reason to please papa."

If she had known what going to Holmedale was to bring forth—if she had known that all the dreary monotony of her life was to be broken up, never to be resumed—if



she had foreseen the troubled joy and bitter sorrow in store for her, she would not have spoken so quietly of going.

Two days afterward they went to Holmedale, a beautiful estate in the most picturesque part of Cornwall, Lord Leighton's family seat, known to every artist and every lover of English scenery. Lord Leighton had met the St. Normans during the previous season in London. He had conceived a great liking for the society of Lord St. Norman, as his wife had done for that of Lady Helen, and the visit was the result of a promise made in London.

Lady Leighton had expressed a great desire to see Ethel, and Lord St. Norman had promised them that he would bring her to Holmedale. As Lady St. Norman had said, a great political combination had arisen, and the visit was one of policy as well as of pleasure.

The journey was delightful, and their welcome at the hall warm and affectionate. Clarice Leighton, who had hoped for the gay society of a beautiful girl, was somewhat dismayed when she was introduced to the magnificently lovely woman whose sad, sweet eyes had a story in their depths. There was no hope of gay companionship with her. Lady Leighton was startled by her wondrous beauty. She said afterward to her husband,—

“Miss St. Norman is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen; but there is some sad experience in her face.”

A large party was gathered at Holmedale, and Lord Leighton told the St. Normans that other visitors were expected; and they looked forward to a pleasant and agreeable sojourn. It was on the third day after their arrival that some one expressed a wish to see the beautiful Holme Woods, already famed in song and in story. Lady Leighton proposed a picnic luncheon there, and the idea was cordially welcomed.

During dinner the discussion turned on the educa-

tion of the lower classes, for which Lord Leighton himself was a great advocate.

"I was astonished the other day," he said, "on going into a cottage belonging to one of my keepers, to find a volume of Racine on the table, and to see one of Goethe's most famous works on the book-shelf. The man came in shortly afterward, and I found that he was an excellent French and German scholar."

"That is the march of education, indeed," said Lord St. Norman—"a keeper who is a good linguist."

"I confess to have felt some degree of surprise myself," acknowledged Lord Leighton. "But why should I have felt it? The man may have had a good education; and what an infinite source of pleasure it must be to him!"

"I should imagine him to be somebody in disguise," said Miss Leighton, laughingly—"the heir of some noble house."

"He is one of the best servants I have ever had," observed Lord Leighton. "He has been with me rather more than a year, and he knows every tree in the woods, I believe. He would make an excellent guide for to-morrow. You will want to see the waterfall, and all the beauties of the neighborhood. I must send word to him to be in readiness."

"What is the name of your accomplished keeper?" asked one of the guests, carelessly.

"He rejoices in the very English name of John Smith," replied Lord Leighton; "and I think the prejudice against the name of Smith a very unjust one."

A discussion then rose over names, and the keeper who spoke French and German was forgotten.

The morrow rose bright and beautiful, a summer day without a cloud; the wind was sweet, soft, and fragrant.

"The deep shade of the woods will be cool and pleasant to-day," said Lady Leighton. And her visitors agreed with her.

Some of the ladies took books, others took fancy-work, and it was settled that the party should spend the whole day in the woods, but should meet at the waterfall for luncheon at two.

On this warm bright summer day there were no gorgeous toilets; the ladies were content with dresses of muslin. Ethel wore one of blue, with a pretty white lace mantilla, and a hat with a white drooping plume; and Lady St. Norman, as she looked at her, thought she had never appeared more lovely—her queenly grace, her exquisite beauty, her royal dignity of manner, all showed on that day to the greatest advantage.

“Ethel,” said Lady St. Norman, “try to enjoy yourself to-day. I wish that I could put a little of this sunshine into your heart.”

But Ethel only stooped and kissed the kindly, anxious face.

“The sunshine would be of no use to me,” she thought. “My sun has set.”

At the large gates that led to the woods they were met by the keeper—a tall, handsome man, whose eyes were keen and blue; his features could hardly be distinguished because of his broad-brimmed hat, and long mustache, and beard, and thick, curly hair. He doffed his hat with an air of good breeding not lost upon the ladies. He spoke, and his voice was pleasant, his accent good; his figure was tall and well formed, his manners were certainly superior to his position. He stood in silence while Lord Leighton discussed where they should go first.

“Let us see. We will visit Leighton’s Folly first,” he said—“that is the ruin of a picturesque old dower-house built in the Italian style by one of the Leighton ladies many years ago.”

They went. A group of ladies stood round the rim of a fountain, when the keeper first caught a glimpse of Ethel

She was standing under the shade of a large copper-beach, and a light like that of burnished gold fell over her—fell on the beautiful, sad face, the cloud-like dress, and the rich, rippling masses of brown hair. As he looked, his handsome face first flushed deepest crimson, and then grew pale as death. He muttered something to himself—some strange words—and the keys that he held in his hand fell to the ground. He stooped to raise them, and then withdrew that he might watch the beautiful face more closely.

“It cannot be Ethel,” he said to himself. “It cannot be she. Great heavens! am I mad or dreaming? Shall I wake up and find myself at St. Ina’s, and all that black, horrible time only a dream—only a dream? Ah, if it could but be so! It cannot be she.”

Ethel moved as she watched her, and a sharp, keen pain shot through his heart.

“It is Ethel. I know that smile, that graceful bend of the neck, that curve of the sweet, proud lips. It is she; it is Ethel—my wife—my wife!”

He turned aside—that strong, powerful man—with eyes dimmed with tears.

“I have found her at last,” he said to himself—“Ethel Ethel—my wife!”

## CHAPTER XLI.

LUNCHEON was all arranged after the most orderly and picturesque fashion, and the laughing, happy party were gathered around it. Ethel sat next to Clarice; some half dozen gentlemen had tried to get a place near her, but she had cleverly evaded them all. Clarice was busy over some beautiful grapes. Looking up, laughingly, she said,—

“Do you notice our disguised heir, the keeper? He is a very handsome man. There he is, standing by the well—and how intently he is watching us!”

“I did not notice him,” returned Ethel, calmly.

But when Clarice had turned to the gentleman nearest to her, she looked across at the keeper, whose eyes were fixed intently on her face.

At first she felt inclined to resent the intent, earnest gaze; a proud flush of annoyance rose to her beautiful face; and then there seemed to be something familiar in those keen blue eyes—something familiar, though half-forgotten, in that handsome *debonnair* face—something in the pose of the tall figure which struck her with a thrill of uneasiness.

The truth came to her at last with a keen, sharp pain, a feeling of despair—it came to like a flash of lightning, and she knew that the man looking so wistfully, so earnestly at her was no other than her husband, Laurie Carington.

She did not cry or faint; no deadly swoon came to her aid. She sat still and endured her agony. Neither rack nor scaffold ever gave greater torture than Ethel suffered as the truth flashed across her. The long calm, the dreary

monotony, was broken at last; the respite was ended. She had borne the suspense of the long years, now she had to meet the consequences of her folly; there could be no more calm oblivion. He had returned, and the secret could be one no longer.

While the others talked and laughed, while the sound of happy voices filled her ears, she sat still and thought. One or two, looking at the beautiful, sad face, wondered what the story was that was written there. Lady St. Norman saw that Ethel's features were listless no longer, that a look of intent thoughtfulness had deepened on them. Ethel was thinking what was to come next. Would he claim her, this husband of hers? Would he dare tell the world the shameful story of how he had practised on her youth—how he had duped her, lured her to her ruin, imposed on her girlish simplicity and ignorance? Would he dare to tell that story to the world?

If he did claim her, could she be forced to go to him? No—she thought not. Her father would surely befriend her, unless, knowing what she had done, he grew angry with her, and cast her off. She would never go to Laurie Carrington, even if he had recourse to the law, and the law directed her. She would kill herself rather than submit.

Supposing that he did not claim her—that he only haunted her—how was she to bear it? The terrible reality of what she had done had never come home to her until now. Since the fatal hour of her marriage she had never seen him, and the oblivion that seemed to have fallen over him made her lot perhaps easier to bear; but, now that she saw him again, the disgrace, the humiliation, the degradation of her position flashed across her—at any moment this man, who was a common forger, might claim her—publicly claim her as his wife. If she knew what he intended to do, it would be easier to bear.

While her whole soul was racked with terrible suspense and terrible anguish, by the torture of shame and the deadly fear of exposure, she was obliged to answer questions, to smile in reply to remarks made to her. She could have cried aloud in her anguish, she could have prayed to the blue heavens to fall upon and hide her. Yet she was outwardly calm—only the quivering of the sweet lips and the tight clinching of the white hands betrayed that she was not as calm as she appeared.

She felt that the crisis of her life had arrived, and she braced herself to meet it. Gradually she calmed the trembling nerves.

“I must bear my fate,” she thought. “No regret, no complaint will be of the least use to me. I have borne before, and I must bear again. Endurance is the great lesson of life.”

She must bear it. Let life bring what it might, it must end. She was passive in the hands of her fate. When she roused herself, Clarice was laughing at her.

“You are in dreamland, Miss St Norman,” she said. “When you feel disposed to return, will you answer papa’s question? He is asking if you would like to go to the Priory. The ruins are pretty, but not large.”

Ethel turned with a crimson face to Lord Leighton.

“I should like it very much,” she said, without knowing in the least what she was saying.

Then they all rose and went away together. She did not turn round to look at her husband. She never even glanced that way. If he intended to speak to her he would without doubt find an opportunity; she would not. Yet she would not have felt in the least surprised if he had claimed her publicly and called her his wife.

She walked over the green sward, the wild flowers clustering beneath her feet, the green boughs tossing and waving above her head.

"Am I dead to all pain?" she asked herself—for the stupor of despair that had overwhelmed her, prevented her feeling the full smart of her sorrow.

More than once that day—that long, dreary, never-to-be-forgotten day—did she hear the sound of his voice quite close to her; but she never looked at him. The sound made her faint and ill, it made her shudder with loathing and dread. More than once in passing, the folds of her dress touched him. She did not draw them aside with a haughty gesture; she would not seem to avoid him or to seek for an opportunity of speaking to him. She called all her natural pride and dignity to her aid—she bore herself with royal grace.

Only Heaven knew how great her relief was when Lord Leighton said that it was time to return. The party was divided into laughing, merry groups. Some one was talking to Ethel, and she saw the keeper coming toward her with something white in his hand.

"He is coming to claim me," she thought, and a flame of true courage seemed to flash from her heart to her face. She stood proudly erect to meet the blow. "I will die hard," she thought to herself with a bitter smile.

He was standing before her, hat in hand, bowing low, as a slave before an empress. He held out a small folded paper.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but this I think belongs to you."

She looked at him steadily, and his eyes fell before her proud, serene gaze. For one half minute she was tempted to defy him—to say it was not hers, and then turn proudly away. But something like a gleam of pity for him came over her, and she took the paper from him. He turned quickly away.

At last she was alone in her room at Holmedale Park. She never remembered returning; but she was there, hold-



ing that folded paper in her hand. A mist swam before her eyes ; a proud, indignant flush rose to her face. The words of the paper filled her with an indescribable loathing :

“ I have found you, Ethel—my wife—at last, after looking for you for long months. I have found you, and once more looked upon that face which contains all the beauty of earth for me. Ethel, I must speak to you. I never thought when the sun rose that I should see you before it had set. Ethel, I must see you. Will you walk to-morrow in the Holme Woods, as I will be there? I have so much to say to you ; but I can think of nothing now, except that I have seen you, Ethel, my beautiful wife.”

She tore the paper into a thousand shreds.

“ I will not meet him,” she said to herself. “ He is a released felon. He has deceived me once, but he shall never deceive me again. He may do what he pleases, but I will not meet him.”

Her anger and indignation were most violent ; they outrivaled her despair. Then the requirements of society had to be met. She was obliged to go down to dinner, and look as composed as could be. She would not go out at all on the day following, lest he should be waiting and see her.

“ He must understand, once and for all, that there can be no word between him and me,” she said to herself. “ If he persists in claiming me, my friends must shield me, or I will go away and hide myself.”

So she spent the whole day in the house, and would not leave it.

Three days passed, and she heard no word of him. She never forgot the slow torture of those days, the miserable suspense, the uncertainty. Every noise alarmed her, every voice startled her ; she was every moment expecting

dreading, fearing that he would make some sign—yet from him came none.

She heard at last. As they stood one morning, just after luncheon, discussing some charades that were to be acted that evening, Ethel saw a footman coming toward her with a beautiful basket of ferns in his hand. The man bowed and held them out to her.

“The keeper has sent these, miss, and he says you will find a list of ferns inside.”

She was compelled to take it because so many people were looking on, but her face flushed proudly. Lord Leighton smiled.

“Smith told me yesterday, Miss St. Norman, that he was looking for some ferns for you. You wished for some, I suppose?”

She would not have told an untruth to save her life. Fortunately, Lord Leighton did not wait for a reply.

“Holme Woods have always been famous for their ferns,” he said. “I am glad you have so beautiful a collection, Miss St. Norman.”

And Ethel, with a smile, turned away.

## CHAPTER XLII.

“I AM not surprised, Ethel”—so the second letter ran—“that you refuse to see me ; but, my wife, it must be. Desperate men do desperate deeds, and I have long been desperate. I must see you and speak to you. I have wronged you enough, Ethel ; I cannot bear to bring more sorrow upon you. I do not want to make the secret that binds us public. Let me see you and arrange for our future. Oh, Ethel, Ethel ! let me look once more into the heaven of your eyes, and I shall be content. Let me speak to you once more, and, Ethel, you shall do with me as you will. I ask one grace from you—do not hate me for the wrong that I have done you !”

She read the letter, and despite her anger, she felt something like pity for him. He has loved her so dearly, he had worshipped her so passionately. Moreover, the tone of his letter was so humble. He promised to do as she wished. Perhaps, after all, the shame and disgrace of a public scandal might be spared, her secret kept. Perhaps he would promise never to molest her—never to claim her : and by that one interview she might secure peace.

She would go and meet him, she decided. She would hear what he had to say. Not that it would make any difference now, but she might persuade him to go away and leave her in peace. She would meet him in the woods ; it would be very easy for her to get away under the pretext of sketching. Even if she were seen speaking to him, nothing would be thought of it, because it was known that he had been collecting ferns for her.

So she wrote a little note, telling him that she would be in Holme Woods on the day following. The note was so written that all the world might have read it, and have seen no more in it than a simple desire to procure more ferns. The note was returned with the basket to John Smith, the keeper.

\* \* \* \* \*

The hour came when they two—husband and wife, who had been as strangers—stood face to face. They met in the woods while the sun was full at noon, and the world smiling under its warm caress. They stood face to face, she looking calmly at him. After a longing, wistful, pitiful glance, he fell on his knees at her feet.

“Ethel!” he cried, “I have longed to see you; but now that you are here, I hardly dare to look at your face. I am ashamed.”

“It was a cruel deception, Mr. Carrington,” she said, in a clear, pitiless voice—“cruel, base, and unmanly. You took a mean advantage of my youth—you lured me to what you knew was my ruin.”

“I know it, Ethel. I have no excuse to offer except that I loved you dearly. I could not live without you—and love urged me on.”

“Pray, do not speak of love,” she said, with calm, grave contempt. “As I understand the word, you knew nothing of it. When men love they spare, and are merciful. You had no pity upon me. Heaven help me now.”

“O, Ethel! beautiful Ethel—speak one word to me! I would give my life to undo what I did then—I would suffer anything to give you back your freedom.”

“It is too late,” she said. “Your pity comes all too late.”

“I thought it would be different,” he explained. “I never meant you to know the story of my sin. I thought I could persuade you to go to America with me; and, Ethel

I would have made you happy—I would have given you all that your heart desired.”

“That is, you would have kept me on the proceeds of forgery and theft?” she interrupted, passionately.

“No—not so. I loved you so dearly that your love would have made a good man of me.”

“I have missed a glorious mission,” she said, mockingly.

“Oh, Ethel,” he pleaded, “do not be so hard upon me! See, I am kneeling, praying to you for one kind word. Give me that, and I will go away—I will go to the utmost ends of the earth, where no sight of me shall ever trouble you again. One kind word, Ethel!”

“I shall never speak it,” she said, haughtily. “What right have you, who have marred my whole life, to ask one kind word from me?”

“Have I blighted all your life, Ethel?” he asked, sadly.

“You must know that you have. I was only a child when you met me—a fearless, ignorant, wilful child. You played upon my pride—upon my foolish wish for revenge—and so persuaded me to marry you. You knew that I was too young to understand how solemn and serious a thing marriage is. Had you been all that you represented yourself—had you been a gentleman, a man of honor—it would still have been base and bad enough. But you were not a gentleman; you were a forger. You were not an honorable man, but a thief. Soiled and stained with crime, how dared you marry me?”

“How dared I?” he echoed. “Oh, Ethel, it was the irresistible might of my love!”

“Of your selfishness rather!” she cried. “It was not love. You have blighted my whole life.”

He looked up at her with a wistful, piteous glance.

“Ethel,” he said, humbly, “did you ever love me?”

“No,” she replied, “never in the least. You flattered me, you gratified my foolish pride, you made my anticipated revenge seem very sweet; but I never loved you, not even on that summer morning when we stood in the old church together. You flattered me, and I had a kindly liking for you which I mistook for love. I knew afterward that I never had loved and never could love you.”

“What has become of your liking, Ethel?” he asked.

“It has changed into unutterable contempt,” she replied—“contempt that lies too deep for words.”

“I cannot expect anything else,” he said, mournfully. “I deserve it all. It was selfish and cruel; but I loved you so dearly, Ethel. I would die to undo it. I thought it would all be so different. I thought we should go to some distant land where I might spend my whole life in loving you and toiling for you—where you would never hear of my sin. I would not have made you my wife if I had foreseen what was to happen. Ethel—do not be afraid—tell me, have you seen any one whom you could have loved?”

“Yes, I have seen one such—I have loved and parted with the man who loved me, and who would have made my life all fair and bright but for you.”

“I am so sorry—oh, if I could but free you, Ethel!”

“It is too late for freedom to benefit me,” she rejoined. “Live your life, repent of your sin—your death could do no good to me.”

“Ethel! one kind word! Oh! if you knew what I have suffered, the torture I have experienced in longing for one glimpse of you—for one word from you. I am a wicked man; my crime was great, but my sufferings have exceeded it. I bade you good-by at that little gate, hoping in a few short hours, to be far away with you, my beautiful, beloved wife, by my side. Can you imagine what I endured when I was captured and taken away?”

“It was but the just reward for your mean and wretched sin,” she replied.

Something like a sob came from his lips.

“You are so cruelly hard, Ethel,” he said—“so terribly hard. I am kneeling here at your feet, sad and humble. I do not ask for your love—only for your pity—not even for your liking—only for your pardon, and you refuse it to me.”

“I do refuse it,” returned the clear, sweet, pitiless voice. “Such a wrong as you did me deserves no pardon—can have none. I will never forgive you for having blighted my life.”

“I will undo what I have done, if I can,” he offered, sadly. “There is one way in which you can be freed from me, Ethel. Tell your father—I hear that he is a man of great influence—tell him your story, and let him take proceedings for a divorce.”

“It would be useless if I did,” she rejoined; “my freedom would not benefit me. I would rather die than tell an honorable gentleman like my father that I had married a felon.”

A low cry came from his lips.

“Oh, Ethel, Ethel, you wound me! I cannot bear the sound of such words from your lips;” and in the silence of the sweet summer morning she heard him sob like a grieving child.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

“I HAVE no wish to be hard upon you,” said Ethel to her husband ; “ but it was a cruel thing to do—to persuade a girl so young and ignorant to take so serious a step as marriage ; it was a most cruel thing, and I repeat that I can never forgive you ! ”

He raised his face, and she saw that it was wet with tears.

“ Even if I were rich, then, Ethel—if I could lavish every luxury on you—if I could make you one of the first women in England—even then you would not care for me ? ”

“ No,” she replied. “ You have failed in honor, not to mention honesty ; how could I possibly care for you ? ”

He was silent for some little time, and then he raised his eyes sadly to her proud face.

“ I cannot expect you to pardon me,” he said. “ What can I do to help you, Ethel ; to free you from myself—what can I do ? If it pleases you best, I will go away from here, and I will promise never again while I live and you live to come near you to trouble or annoy you. Or, if it pleases you better, Ethel, I will wait here until, with your father’s help, you have obtained a divorce—it would not be difficult.”

“ It would be useless,” she replied. “ Men cannot put asunder those whom Heaven has joined. I should never marry.”

“ I will do anything that will please you, Ethel, or whatever you think best,” he pursued. “ One thing I promise you—the wrong I have done you is great enough ; I will



make it no worse. I will keep the secret inviolably ; it shall never escape me ; I will not presume upon it. Ethel, you may trust me ; I would rather lose my life than betray you any further ! ”

That was some relief to her ; the public exposure that she had dreaded would not take place.

“ You wish for time to consider, ” he said, gently. “ If you decide that I must go away, I shall need some few days to prepare. Will you take a week to think over what would suit you and please you best ? Will you meet me here in the woods at the same hour just one week from to-day ? ”

“ Yes, ” she answered, wearily, “ I will be here. ”

“ Ethel, ” he cried, passionately, “ will you not give me one kind word ? ”

“ I cannot, ” she replied. “ It would simply be hypocrisy if I did. You have ruined my whole life. When I forget that, I may pardon you. ”

“ Will you let me tell you the story of my life, ” he asked—“ of my youth, my temptations, and my fall ? You would, perhaps take more pity on me if you knew all. ”

She raised her white hand with a gesture that demanded silence.

“ I do not wish to hear one word of it, ” she said. “ I must go. I will do as you suggest. I will take one week to consider, and then tell you what plan I think is best for you to adopt. ”

She looked at him as she spoke—at the handsome face the eyes dim with tears—and a feeling of pity came over her.

“ I do not wish to be hard upon you, ” she said, gently, “ and I pray Heaven that the last part of your life may be better than the first. ”

Then she turned away, leaving him more wretched than he had ever thought he should be in this world again.

Ethel hastened home. The ordeal she had dreaded was over. She had seen her husband again, had spoken to him, and she began to see some glimmer of light for the future. She would ask him to go away. If he was so poor in fortune as he seemed to be from the fact of his having sought the situation of gamekeeper, she would give him money. She had plenty of that ; she would give him enough to live on in comfort, provided only that he did not come near her—that he kept her secret, and allowed her to live in peace. If he would do that, then her fate would not be so terrible as she had once dreaded. Then she might live through the long years until death released her or released him—without happiness, it was true, but without such shame and sorrow as might have fallen to her lot.

“ And this,” she thought, “ is the end of my life—the life that I once filled with such bright visions, with such glowing hopes ; the end of it all is hard-won peace. I can ask no more.”

She was greatly relieved. She had dreaded what her husband might do—that he might claim her as his wife—that he might make her story public—that he might shame her before the whole world. All this fear was ended now. The humbled, sorrowful man who had knelt at her feet to implore her pardon would never wrong her again. More peace came to her than had been hers for some time. The restless face grew calmer, the shadowed eyes were bright.

“ I shall come to the end of my troubles soon,” she thought, “ and then I shall have nothing to do but live out my life in patience, thankful to have escaped a worse fate.”

It was not the most brilliant end to a life that had once seemed so full of hope ; but she must be content.

That evening another shock came to her. During

dinner Lord Leighton said that on the morrow he expected a distinguished visitor—a brave soldier whose name was wreathed in laurels—a traveller whose researches were most valuable. He turned suddenly to Lord St. Norman.

“And, if I remember rightly,” he added, “my visitor is an old friend of yours. He does not know that you are here, so it will be an additional pleasure to him to meet you.”

“Who is it!” asked Lord St. Norman, carelessly.

But the carelessness all vanished when he heard the name.

“Sir Oscar Charlcote.”

He looked quickly at his daughter. She had heard it too. He saw the color die out of her face, and an expression of startled fear come over it.

“Sir Oscar,” he repeated, slowly. “Ah, yes; he is one of my most valued friends. But I understood he was in Egypt. Why has he returned to England?”

“It was time he did,” said Lord Leighton. “I never could understand why he left the country. We want such men at home. He is returning, I believe, because the borough of Weston is vacant, and he has been asked to sit for it.”

“He will go into Parliamrnt, then? I am glad of that,” said Lord St. Norman. He was wondering in his own mind what Ethel would say, and how she would like to see her lover again.

“Sir Oscar comes to-morrow morning,” observed Lord Leighton. “I have invited several people to meet him at dinner. He will stay, I hope, for some weeks. He is a distant relative of mine, and I consider that I have the first claim upon him.”

Then some one asked if he was married. Lord Leighton laughingly answered no—that Sir Oscar seemed afraid of ladies; he had never heard of his caring for one.

Again Lord St. Norman stole a look at his daughter—her face was white as death. He tried to turn the conversation so that she should have a chance to recover herself.

But Ethel could not for some time get over the shock. She had borne her sorrow patiently, believing that she should never see Sir Oscar again. Their farewell, she believed, had been for all time, and now suddenly, with scant warning, she was to see him again.

“If he knew I was here,” she said to herself, “I am quite sure he would not come.”

She dreaded meeting him—dreaded it, yet longed for it with an intense desire.

“It seems like cruel irony,” she mused, “that I should meet both of them here—the man who has marred and blighted my life, and the man whom I love. If I had read of such a meeting in any novel, I should have thought it too strange even to be true. It is a cruel trick of fortune.”

It had to be borne; she was growing accustomed to silent, brave endurance. She said to herself that fear and hope alike were useless; she had to bear her lot, and there was no use in murmuring.

Lady St. Norman, looking at the beautiful, thoughtful face, said,—

“Ethel, shall you like meeting Sir Oscar again?”

“It cannot be helped,” Ethel replied, evasively. “It will be a great pleasure to papa, I know, and I am glad that he has returned to England.”

“He is not married, you see,” said Lady St. Norman.

“No,” acknowledged the girl, calmly; “he is not married, and for his own sake I am inclined to think it is almost a misfortune for him.”

## CHAPTER XLIV.

THEY met once more—the two who had parted in such sorrow and pain. Ethel happened to be with Lady Leighton when the visitor arrived. She could not hasten away without drawing more attention to herself than she desired. She saw Sir Oscar before he had time to notice her. She stilled the terrible beating of her heart, the trembling of her limbs.

“It has to be borne,” she said to herself; “let me bear it bravely.”

While he spoke to Lady Leighton she looked earnestly at him. He was greatly changed; the face that she remembered as so bright and hopeful was careworn and sad. He looked like a man who had passed through great and bitter trouble. She was still gazing eagerly, wistfully at him, when, turning suddenly, he saw her.

She never forgot the startled shock of pain that came over his face; and he was like a man who had received a sudden blow and could hardly recover from it. With grave courtesy he held out his hand in greeting to her.

She made her escape as soon as possible. The pain of meeting him again—of meeting him so coldly, so soberly—was greater almost than the pain of parting had been. She wept bitter tears over it. Of course, it could not be otherwise; they had parted years ago—they were to be only as strangers. But she could not endure it—it seemed harder to her than any sorrow she had borne. She said to herself that she would ask Lord St. Norman to leave Holmedale; he would not refuse her—he must not refuse her, for she could not bear her present trial.

She saw but little of Sir Oscar that day: they met at the dinner table, but he was next to Clarice Leighton, who was trying to make a conquest of the man whom all other men honored. After dinner he talked again to Clarice, and Ethel, with an aching heart, sat and watched him.

They were parted. Never while life lasted could they be anything to each other. They were to be strangers. Yet she could not bear it. She sat for a short time, and then went to her own room. Perhaps that night was the longest and saddest that Ethel ever passed.

It was two days before she saw Sir Oscar to speak to him; and then she was in the conservatory alone. When he entered and saw her, his face lighted up for a few moments, and then the careworn expression returned. He went over to her.

"Ethel," he said, gently, "I have been longing to see you alone. I wanted to speak to you. Will you listen to me for a brief while?"

"Yes," she replied.

"I want to tell you that, if I had known you were here, I would not have come. I would not have given either you or myself the pain of meeting again—it is too hard to bear. I came for some weeks, but I shall not remain, I shall go away in a few days."

She bowed her head, but made no answer.

"Ethel," he continued, hurriedly, "tell me one thing. I am unchanged. My love for you has increased, not lessened—it is the greatest happiness, yet the greatest torment of my life. If I repeated my question, if I prayed you again to be my wife, what would your answer be?"

She was silent for some short time, and then she raised her eyes to his face.

"It must be the same as before," she replied. "It is not more possible for me now than it was then to be your wife."

“ I feared it ; ” he said, sadly. “ Ah, me, how full of sorrow life is, Ethel ! I cannot remain here and bear the torture of seeing you, knowing that you can never be mine. I must go. There can be no pretext of friendship for us. I hardly dared to hope, yet my second disappointment is harder than the first.”

“ I am very sorry,” she said gently.

“ I know, Ethel—I know. Would to Heaven things could have been otherwise ! I should have——”

But he never finished the sentence. Lady Leighton came in, and he could say no more.

Ethel did not go downstairs again that day. If she could have had her own way, she would not have seen him again—it was only useless pain.

“ He will be gone soon,” thought the desolate girl ; “ and then I shall suffer no more.”

Sir Oscar made a desperate attempt to leave Holmedale, but Lord Leighton would not hear of it. In vain the baronet pleaded pressure of business.

“ You promised to remain several weeks,” said Lord Leighton ; “ you must, at least, stay for one.”

Reluctantly enough he complied. “ It will soon pass,” he thought ; “ and I will take care that I do not see her again.”

Three days elapsed, and then Ethel awoke to a sense of how time was speeding. She had to meet Laurie Carrington on the morrow, and tell him what she had decided. She had not thought much of the matter, but the result of her musing was, she would ask him to go away and leave her.

She had decided what course to pursue. She was ready to meet Laurie Carrington—to part with him—to tell him what money she could send to him ; it was all settled and arranged in her own mind. She was ready, too, to part with Sir Oscar—there was no help for it ; and, like him

self, she breathed a fervent prayer that they might not meet again.

Dinner-time came, and the guests were all assembled. Their host, however, was absent, and they waited some little time for him. Lord Leighton came in at last. He looked pale and anxious. He made some hurried apology for his absence, and then they went in to dinner. It was half over when Ethel heard one gentleman say to another, in a low voice,—

“Have you heard of the accident? A keeper has been shot in the woods.”

Ethel heard the words; they were like a terrible shock to her—like a sudden blow. Presently she rallied herself. There were many keepers. How could she tell which one had been shot?

She heard Lord Leighton saying,—

“I did not intend to mention it during dinner; but as you have already heard the news, I may say it is quite true.”

One of the keepers shot in the woods! Some one offered Ethel wine, and she drank it mechanically.

“Which of the men was it?” asked a gentleman.

“The one I was speaking of the other day—the well-educated one. I fancy there was some little mystery about him. They tell me that after he was shot he called incessantly some woman’s name.”

“How did it happen?” asked another.

“Very simply. He was carrying a loaded gun, and the trigger caught in a bush. It went off, and shot him in the lungs.”

“My cousin was shot in the same way,” said a visitor. “Is the poor man dead, Lord Leighton?”

“No. I sent for all the doctors far and near: but though they do not quite agree as to the mode of treat-



ment, they tell me the same thing—he has not twenty-four hours to live !”

“ Has he all that he requires ? ” asked Lady Leighton.

“ Yes. But I am sure there is a mystery about the man. He has lived in a different position—he has been in different circumstances. He has tried very eagerly to say something to me, but he could not.”

“ What is his name ? ” asked Sir Oscar Charlote ; and Lord Leighton replied,—

“ His name is John Smith, but I have my own reasons for thinking that it is only assumed. I am very sorry for him. An accident of that kind is always terrible.”

“ There is no hope for him, then ? ” said Sir Oscar, pityingly.

“ Not the least in the world,” was the reply. “ He may, he will, in all probability—rally, but it will not be for long.”

There was a sudden cry, a sudden commotion. The beautiful Miss St. Norman had fainted, and had fallen from her seat to the floor. They hastened to raise her. Sir Oscar looked at the death-like face.

“ It is the heat of the room,” said one.

Another suggested that it was owing to the long morning's drive. No one guessed that the news just told could have any interest for Lord St. Norman's proud, beautiful daughter.

She was taken to her room, and kindly hands tended her. Lady St. Norman did not leave her until the color had returned to her face, and she was able to sit up. Then Ethel begged that she might be left alone.

“ I am not ill,” she said—“ believe me, Helen ; but I am tired, and I would so much rather be left quite alone.”

To please her, Lady St. Norman went away, and Ethel was left to her thoughts. They were all chaos, all confusion. She could not disentangle them ; she could only remember, as she sat there, that Laurie, who had been a

forger and a thief—Laurie, who had married her, lay dying, and that she had refused to pardon him.

Would he keep their secret? or, in the agony of death, would he reveal it? She was almost indifferent; the shock of the accident was so terrible to her. She would have parted from him on the morrow; she would have sent him away to the other end of the world, never to see him again; but there was something terrible in the turn which things had now taken.

As she sat there, some one gently opened the door. Her maid entered, bearing in her hand a small folded paper.

“Can I speak to you for a moment, miss?” she asked. “One of the men has just given me this. The keeper who met with the accident this morning has sent it; and, thinking it may be about money, I brought it to you at once.”

“You did right,” said Ethel. “It will be better not to mention it;” and the maid, thinking that it was an application for money made by the sick man, not only promised, but kept her word.

Ethel opened the letter eagerly—the last she was ever to have from him. It was with difficulty that she could decipher the words. It said simply,—

“I am dying, Ethel. Dear, I cannot die without your pardon—I have loved you too much. Come to me for a few minutes; stand by me, look at me with your calm eyes, and say, ‘I forgive you, Laurie,’ and then I can die in peace. If you refuse, I shall not find rest, even in my grave.”

He was a criminal—he had blighted her life—he had taken from her all hope and happiness; but, as she read, warm, sweet pity rose in her heart. He had loved her so dearly, and he was dying.

"I will go to him," she said to herself. "He shall find rest in his grave."

The night was growing dark. She sent for her maid.

"Lisette," she said, "I am about to put great confidence in you. - I want to go out, and no one must know it. I shall be absent some short time. Will you sit in my room here and wait for me, and let me in when I return?"

The girl looked at her with clear, honest eyes.

"I will do all you wish, miss," she replied; "no one shall know that you are out, and no one shall enter your room while you are away. I will wait for you; I can let you in by one of the side doors. I will get the key."

Whatever Lisette may have thought, she said nothing.

"I suppose," said Ethel, "that the poor man who was wounded to-day, lies in the cottage?"

"Yes, he has a woman from the village to nurse him. If you are going out, miss, would it not be better to put on a large cloak and a thick veil, so that you may not be recognized?"

Ethel thought the suggestion a good one. She had not removed the rich jewels, nor the silk dinner-dress; there was no time to be lost in changing them now. She wrapped herself in a large dark travelling cloak, and hid her white, beautiful face with a thick veil.

"You will be careful," she said to Lisette; and then, unperceived and unnoticed, she quitted the house.

The clock over the stables was striking ten! She did not feel quite sure whether she knew the way to the cottage, yet it could not be very far distant from the house, it was at the entrance to the woods, she remembered, and the walk to the woods had not seemed to her a long one. She hurried on. Presently the deep baying of a hound startled her. She said to herself,—

"I must not lose courage. I must go. He is dying; I must see him, or he will not rest in his grave."

But the night was dark, and the way was strange—she took the wrong path. She grew confused and frightened. More than once she fancied that she heard her husband's voice crying, "Ethel, Ethel!" and she imagined that she saw his face, all white and cold in death, floating before her.

"It is only a fancy," she said to herself; but her nervous fears increased. Every whisper of wind, every rustle of the leaves, thrilled her heart with a new and strange fear. She was confused, frightened, bewildered. She stood still, hesitating for one minute whether she should cry out or not; and then, to her infinite relief, she saw a tall figure just before her—the figure of a man. He was evidently smoking, for the fragrance of a cigar reached her. It was wonderful how quickly her fears were dispelled.

"Who is it?" she asked herself. "Let it be who it may, I must not be seen."

She turned away, hoping not to be seen; but quick footsteps followed her, and presently Sir Oscar's voice said, calmly,—

"Ethel, I know you. I saw you some minutes since, and came to meet you. I should have recognized your figure and your walk anywhere. You could never hide yourself from me."

She stood quite still at the first sound of his voice; all her strength seemed to desert her.

"I came out, as I do every night," he said, "to smoke a cigar. The night is so calm and sweet and still that I have wandered farther than I intended. But you, Ethel,—what are you doing in the woods alone at this hour of night?"

"You must not ask me," she replied, faintly.

"But I shall do so, Ethel. Your voice is faint, your hands are cold, and your face—your beautiful face—is so white, dear! You are in trouble. Let me help you."

It was a great relief to her; the kind words and the sympathizing voice were so welcome that she broke down. She clung to his strong arm, and wept aloud.

"Ethel, my darling," he said, "you are in trouble. Trust me; let me help you. What is love worth if the one who loves cannot be trusted? I will keep all you say to me as sacred as though it were my own secret, and my life depended on it. Trust me, Ethel."

She stood silent for a few minutes while the night wind moaned around her, and the great branches of the trees swayed above her. What ought she to do? If she refused to trust him, then he would not let her go any farther, and poor Laurie—Laurie who had loved her so dearly—must die without her pardon. If she wished to see him, she must trust Sir Oscar, and if she trusted him, and told him all, then he would never love her again—she would lose his respect and esteem with his love.

"I must see Laurie," she thought. "Living, I might hate him; dying, I must forgive him."

"Ethel," said Sir Oscar, "try to think that I am your brother. If you had a brother of your own, you know how you would trust him. Do the same with me."

"You will never like me again," she confessed. "You will despise me."

"I shall love you until I die, Ethel. Only trust me, try me, prove me. Is your walk connected with that same secret which stands between me and my love?"

"Yes," she replied. "Oh, Oscar, whether you love me or not, I cannot help it now! I must tell you all."

Her beautiful head bent in unutterable shame, her face wet with dropping tears, she told the story of her folly of so long ago—the secret, hurried marriage which had been the bane of her life. She did not omit one detail. She told him the bitter truth in all its nakedness. He listened in surprise that was too great for words.

“My poor child,” he said, gently, when she had finished —“my poor Ethel, how terribly you have suffered! And that man is your husband—yours? It seems incredible,”

Then she remembered how time was passing, and that Laurie Carrington wished to die in peace.

“He is dying, Oscar,” she said, “and I must see him. Will you—it seems strange to ask you—will you take me to him!”

“Yes,” he replied, “you do right to go, Ethel. If he were well I should be one of the first to punish him for his cowardly villany—for his mean wicked sin; dying, I, like you, must pardon him. I will take you, so that I may stand as a shield between you and all harm. Oh, Ethel, my poor child, how terribly you have suffered!”

Even he could not conceive it all; no one but herself could ever know what those years of hidden anguish had been like.

He took her hand silently in his.

“This is the nearest way to the cottage,” he said. “Ethel, it will be better for the world not to know about this matter. There will be people with the poor man—nurses and attendants. How can I best screen you from their observation?”

“I leave all to you,” she returned; and from her heart there rose to Heaven a great cry of thanksgiving that he was there to help her.

“I will send every one from his room,” he said, “and then they will think you are a friend of his. Even should it happen that they mention that a lady has been, it will be thought that some lady from the great house has paid him a visit of compassion. See there—among the trees—that is the cottage. Why, Ethel, I remember reading the story of young Carrington—and a very sad story I thought it was. How little I dreamed, my darling, that it concerned you!”

In another minute they stood at the door of the cottage ; from one of the upper windows came a faint glimmer of light. Sir Oscar rapped gently at the door. It was opened by one of the keepers—a stranger whom Ethel did not recognize.

“ How is the poor man ? ” asked Sir Oscar.

“ Dying slowly, sir ; he will not last until the sun rises.”

“ Is he conscious ? Is he able to speak ? ” inquired Sir Oscar.

“ Yes, sir ; he has been praying, and he is now crying some woman’s name—a strange name, that I have never heard before. The nurse seemed timid, so I offered to remain with her.”

“ That was good and kind of you. We have come to see him. We can go upstairs, I suppose ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; the nurse only is with him.”

Ethel stood by in silence ; it was a great relief to her to find that the man did not think their coming strange—on the contrary, he seemed rather to expect it.

“ I thought some one would come from the hall to night,” he said ; and Sir Oscar slipped a golden fee into his hand. He held the light while they went up the steep, narrow stairs.

“ Ethel, Ethel,” they heard a faint voice crying, “ one word—only one word ! ”

She turned faint and cold when she heard the sound of her own name and the tone of appeal in which it was uttered ; she trembled so violently that it was with difficulty she could mount the stairs.

“ Ethel, Ethel ! ” the voice repeated—“ only one word ! ”

Sir Oscar turned anxiously to her,

“ Do you think you can bear it ? ” he asked.

“ I must, ” she replied.

They heard the voice of the nurse trying to comfort

him, but from him there came no other words but those which they had just heard.

Just before he opened the door, Sir Oscar turned to her again.

“You are trembling, Ethel ; it will be better not to go in. I am anxious about you.”

But she raised her eyes to his face with a look of trust which he never forgot.

“I shall have no fear,” she said, “if you remain with me.”

Then he opened the door, and they entered the room together.



## CHAPTER XLV.

THERE was nothing terrible in the scene that met the eyes of Ethel and Sir Oscar Charlcote when they had entered the room in the keeper's cottage. The apartment was small, square, and scrupulously clean; the bed was at the end near the window, and on it lay the dying man. His face lighted up with a gleam of recognition as he saw the veiled figure of a lady standing near.

Sir Oscar never lost his presence of mind. He turned to the nurse.

"We are come to see your patient, and to remain with him for a short time," he said. "Will you go and rest?"

"I will go downstairs and get myself some tea, sir," she replied; and the next moment she had left the room.

Then the dying man held out his hands to Ethel.

"Ethel," he said, feebly, "you are come at last!"

He had committed a felony, he had blighted her life, he had been vilely selfish and cruelly mean; but he had loved her passionately, and he lay lying. She knelt down by his bedside, and took his hands in hers.

"Take away your veil," he said, "that I may look my last on the face that is all the world to me."

She did not remove her hands. Sir Oscar unfastened the thick veil; it fell with the dark cloak to the ground, leaving her shining jewels and silken dress uncovered. The dying man looked at her with a faint, wandering smile.

"You are come to me in all your bravery of jewels and dress, my queen," he said. "My beautiful queen, I only deserve that you should hate me, yet you let me hold your hands in mine."

“I do not hate you,” she corrected, gently.

“Thank Heaven for that! I am dying, Ethel—my short, ungracious life is nearly ended. My sins and follies are all over. Ah! my queen, listen to me for a few moments—bend your beautiful face lower—so—I cannot speak clearly. Ethel, listen. I was not always bad. I began life with all good intentions, all great, grand, and generous hopes. I was young, happy, gallant, gay. Oh, for my lost youth, my lost life!”

He broke out into a low, feeble wailing, most pitiful to hear.

“My lost life—oh, Ethel, if I might but live it over again—if I might but have time to redeem it! Believe me, dear, wretched outcast though I am now, I was young rich, and happy once. Once I was worthy of your love—now I am deserving of your hate.”

She bent her beautiful face over his, and whispered to him that Heaven was merciful. Her tears fell warm and fast upon his face.

“I wish,” he said faintly, “that I could speak with a voice that all the world might hear—that I might make my fatal story a warning.”

Then he murmured some words that she could not distinguish.

“Ethel,” he cried, in a loud, clear voice, “I am standing on the brink of a deep, dark river; it is rolling so swiftly on! White faces look at me from the waters as they pass by, and the river is rising; the dark waters will cover me soon. Hark, how the waters rush!”

She told him it was only the sound of the wind among the trees—the great, tall trees in the woods. He wandered again——

“The wood, the little gate by the wood, and Ethel, my wife, standing there with the passion-flowers in her hand! Ethel, my wife, standing where the changing light from the

stained glass window falls on her, and one great gleam is blood-red! Ethel, Ethel, my fair young wife!"

She laid her hand on his brow and whispered gentle words to soothe him.

"It is rushing on, Ethel, the dark, swift, silent river—it will take me away. Tell me you forgive me."

He held her hands tightly clasped, he looked in her face with an appealing expression she never forgot.

"Of all the wrong I have done," he said, "the cruelest was to you. It was the most selfish and cruel deed any man could have done to cloud that sweet young life of yours. Ethel, I remember when your voice was all sunshine, and your beautiful lips all smiles. I remember when your voice was all music; and when I saw you again, my queen, so terribly changed, I knew what I had done. Ethel! oh, if the rush of that dark water would but stop! It drowns my voice and it drowns yours. Ethel, say you forgive me—utter my name once more; I have not heard it for years."

"Laurie, I forgive you," she said, gently—"I forgive you the wrong you did me and your cruel deceit. I forgive you, as I pray Heaven to pardon me for my folly and pride. From the very depths of my heart I say, Heaven have mercy on you!" and then she stopped, for he was weeping like a child.

"Ethel," he begged, "when I am dead, remember how I loved you. You have been the one star of my life. Try to forget how wicked and worthless I was—only remember my great, deep, passionate love; say to yourself, 'Poor Laurie—poor, faulty, erring Laurie—how he loved me!' There is a long life before you, my queen, and the grass will soon be growing green over my grave. Let my great love plead for me; think what I suffered on my wedding-day when they took me away. Ethel, grant me one favor. You see that small box?"

He pointed as he spoke to a small, plain, deal box, securely fastened with a lock and key.

“I never thought to die near you,” he continued; “I never hoped to die with your dear hands in mine. Ethel, I am powerless to move; will you take the key that hangs round my neck and unlock that box?”

She removed a silken string from his neck, and with the key attached to it unlocked the box. It held nothing but a few faded flowers, so withered, so faded, she did not recognize them. She carried them to him, and wondered at his wild weeping when he saw them.

“They have been to prison with me,” he said, “they have been over the seas with me; the hardest officials that opened that little box to see what it contained closed it quickly again, and said nothing. I have kissed it when all the diamonds, all the wealth of this world would have been valueless. I have prized it as kings do their crowns—as misers their gold. Do you know what the contents are, Ethel?”

She looked at the withered, faded, dried-up leaves.

“No,” she replied, gently, “I do not.”

“They are the passion-flowers that you held in your hand as a bridal bouquet on the morning we were married, Ethel; they are not more faded or dead than my hopes.”

As he spoke, the whole scene with its surroundings rose vividly before her—the sweet, dewy, summer morning, the church, with its stained glass windows, the altar where she had stood in the varying lights, the passion-flowers that she had gathered all shining with dew. She remembered how he had taken them from her.

“They were suitable flowers for you, Ethel,” he said, sadly. “I remember how grieved I felt at the time, how the sight of them filled me with dismay; but they were well chosen—they were tokens of what was to follow. Roses would have been unfitting for my bride. Oh, Ethel, they

they are not so dead or so faded, dear, as my hopes. You will see that they are buried with me. Promise, Ethel."

"I promise," she replied, but her voice was almost inaudible.

Then he seemed suddenly to become aware of Sir Oscar's presence. He looked at him long and earnestly.

"Ethel," he said, "place those poor dead flowers on my breast, and let me hold your hands in mine. It is only for a few short minutes, dear. The river is rising and I am sinking. You told me that I had blighted your life—that you loved some one from whom you had been obliged to part. This is a noble, fearless face—the face of a good and noble man. Is it he whom you love, Ethel?"

"Yes," she replied—I loved him and parted from him."

"I am glad that he is here."

He turned his dying face to Sir Oscar.

"I am glad that you have come," he said. "Your presence will shield Ethel from all harm, from all comment. May I say something to you? She, my poor young wife, is free from all blame. The lilies in the field are not purer than she is. It was all my fault—all mine. I saw her, and she was so beautiful that I loved her at once with a love that has lasted my life, and will end only with my death. I tempted her. I saw that she was proud, and on her wounded pride, her wounded love, I played skilfully. Ethel never loved me. I flattered her, I studied every weakness of her character, and made them all subservient to my designs. I bear witness here on my deathbed that she was not in the least to blame—that no taint or suspicion of wrong could be attached to her—that I sinned against her. I deceived her. She was young, simple, innocent as a child, and I worked upon her through her faults, and tempted her through her pride, I did her so great a wrong in marrying her that I deserved the bitterest,

punishment, and I have had it. You will not let Ethel suffer for my sin?"

Sir Oscar bent over him, with kindest pity on his face.

"I believe you," he said earnestly. "I am sure that the fair, sweet girl we have both loved is free from blame. It will make your death-bed happier if I tell you something else. I will do all I can to make the remainder of her life happy. I will give her the greatest love—the greatest reverence. I will do all I can to make her forget the terrible past. You may trust me; we will respect your memory, and I will do what you most desire—make her happy."

A light more tender and beautiful than they had seen before came over Laurie Carrington's face. He raised Sir Oscar's hand to his lips.

"May heaven bless you!" he said. "You are a noble man. You are a noble man," he repeated faintly, "and I am glad that she will be happy. There is no more jealousy or envy left in me; it is all dead. I shall die the more easily for knowing what I do. Life is sweet to us all, but I am pleased that I can die and leave her free."

Then his hand relaxed its hold.

"Ethel, Ethel!" he cried, "the river runs on so swiftly and so dark—it is here—up to my lips. Will you bend down and kiss my face once, only once before I die, for my great love's sake?"

She looked up at Sir Oscar.

"Shall I do what he wishes?" her eyes seemed to ask.

He answered her gravely.

"Yes, it is for the last time, Ethel."

She laid her fresh, warm lips on his, already so cold and numb.

"My beautiful queen," he murmured, "my heart's love! Oh, Ethel, Ethel, hold me! The water is here—it is overwhelming me!"

Then the feeble grasp relaxed, the head fell back, he

had fallen into the dark river that was to bear him to the eternal shores.

"He is dead, Ethel," said Sir Oscar, gently: "let me take you away now, dear."

Of her own accord she bent over him again and kissed the cold brow—he had loved her so dearly. She laid the withered flowers on his breast, and then turned away.

"Good-by, Laurie!" she said, while the tears fell from her eyes—"good-by!"

She left him then, silent in death, with a smile on his lips, and the faded passion-flowers on his breast.

In a few words Sir Oscar told the nurse what had happened. She did not evince the least surprise.

"My only wonder is," she said, "that he has lasted so long. It seemed to me as though he could not die."

Then Sir Oscar drew Ethel's arm within his own.

"We must hasten home, my darling," he said, "you are cold and tired."

She wept silently as they went home in the silence of the night together. When the towers of the hall appeared in sight, she turned to him.

"How am I to thank you, Sir Oscar?" she said. "What should I have done without you?"

"I want no thanks, Ethel," he replied; "I am only too happy that in the hour of your distress I was by your side."

Once more she stood alone in her room. Lisette had been most faithful; no one knew of her mistress' absence, and she was there to open the door. She looked wonderingly at the beautiful white face before her.

"I am afraid you have walked too far, miss," she said; "you seem quite exhausted."

"I am very tired," acknowledged Ethel. "But I need not keep you any longer."

The maid went away, and she was left alone. She did not stop to remove the jewels, nor to take off the silken

dress. She lay down on the pretty white bed, exhausted beyond the power of words to tell.

It was all over at last ; the strain of long years, the torture of silence and suspense, the terrible secret, the weight of which had been greater than she could bear—it was all ended. Laurie Carrington, the man she had married, the man whom for long years she had dreaded, lay dead. There was no more to fear from him. He could injure her no more, and the secret of his folly would be buried with him.

She was free. She felt like one who had been for years in a dark prison, and suddenly finds himself in the broad open light of day. She could only repeat to herself over and over again that her long torture was ended—that she was free.

For the first time since that terrible day at St. Ina's she slept a long, dreamless sleep—the sleep of exhaustion—and the rest was so deep and so sweet that she was almost sorry when the light of day awoke her. It was a rest so sweet she would fain have slept on. It was so new and strange to awake without deadly fear as her companion, without dreading what the day might bring forth. A new sensation of life came over her. The tortures of shame and sorrow, the long hopeless despair, were ended at last—she was free.

She did not leave her room that day. It was a respite. She wanted to calm her thoughts, to still the tumult of heart and soul before she met people again. Lady St. Norman advised rest. It would quite restore her, she said. the fainting fit that had alarmed them was caused, no doubt, by over-fatigue.

When she came downstairs on the following day, Sir Oscar was the first person she saw.

“Are you better, Ethel ?” he said. “I have been very anxious about you.”



A faint flush brightened her face. It was new and sweet to be cared for by him.

"I am quite well," she replied; and she was both pleased and touched to notice how, from the distance as it were, he seemed to watch over her. He said little to her, and that pleased her best, while her heart was filled with memories of the dead man.

She was tried almost past her strength that evening, when she heard Lord Leighton tell how he had heard from the nurse that some of his own friends had been to see the dying man.

"They told me also," he continued, "that on his breast was found a bunch of faded flowers. I know nothing of him, but I cannot help thinking that the clue to the mystery of the man's life lay in those faded flowers."

He was buried in the churchyard at Holme, and Sir Oscar Charlcote said he would place a tombstone over the grave. Years afterward, when Ethel went to see it, she was touched to find that passion-flowers grew round it.

She never forgot the morning of Laurie Carrington's funeral—a beautiful summer morning, when the sun shone and nature wore its brightest garb. Several of the servants from the park attended, and some of the visitors went also.

"Ethel," said Sir Oscar, "would you wish to go to the funeral to-morrow?"

"I do not know," she replied. "I had not decided."

"If you would wish to go, I will make it easy for you, by asking you to go with me.

She raised her eyes to his face with that look of implicit trust which always touched him so deeply.

"I will do whatever you think is right," she said.

"Then I should say—go. It is the last and only mark of respect you can pay him. Go, Ethel, it is the right thing to do."

She went. He made it easy for her, as he said, by making his request during breakfast in the presence of Lady St. Norman, who, looking at the beautiful, sorrowing face, added kindly,—

“Go, my dear. The walk in the sunshine will do you good.”

So, while the sun poured down his warmth and light, while the summer wind made sweet music in the trees, while the birds sang and the flowers bloomed, they laid poor, erring, guilty Laurie Carrington in his grave; and of all those who, from sympathy or kindness attended the ceremony, there was not one who suspected that the proud, beautiful, sorrowful Ethel was the dead man's wife.

Two days afterward Sir Oscar said to Ethel,—

“I am going away, Ethel. I know that you, as well as myself, would wish to pay all due respect to the memory of the dead. I will visit Norman's Keep in six months' time, if you are there; and then, my darling, if, for the third time, I ask you to be my wife, what will your answer be?”

“It will be ‘yes,’” she replied, and he went away happy and content.

That same evening Lord St. Norman said to his wife:

“Helen, do you perceive any difference in Ethel?”

Helen laughed.

“Yes; and I venture to prophesy that after all Ethel will be Lady Charlcote,” she said. “Sir Oscar looks too happy for the state of his affairs to be unprosperous.”

“I was astonished at her to-day,” observed Lord St. Norman. “She looked bright, beautiful, and wilful as the Ethel of old. She gave me the idea of one who has had a cloud over her life, and suddenly sees it drifting it away.”

And for the first time for many years Lord St. Norman took courage about his beautiful Ethel

## CHAPTER XLVI.

THERE WAS a chime of wedding-bells, sweet and low, with a strain of plaintive music ever and anon recurring in the jubilant sound—wedding-bells from the church of the little town of St. Normans where Ethel was married.

She had wondered why she wished the wedding to be so quiet—why she almost prayed them to let her be married in the silence of the early morning, without ceremony ; but Lord St. Norman would not consent.

“ My only daughter,” he said, “ about to be married to a man whom I think a hero, to desire a quiet marriage—I could not agree to it. The traditions of the Gordons forbid it.”

So the marriage was grand and magnificent. Honored guests, both rich and poor, were bidden to the feast.

Once more Ethel stood before the altar. This time she carried no passion-flowers in her hand—no crimson gleam from stained-glass windows fell over her. Her husband’s heart gloried in her beauty, and on her fair face there was no shadow of the past.

People said afterward that it was the most beautiful wedding they had ever seen, for it was all flowers. Look where the spectators would, there was nothing but flowers. They said also that so fair a bride had never been seen. The wedding veil fell in graceful folds to her feet, the wreath of orange flowers crowned her like a queen, and the face that shone beneath the veil was most exquisite with its dainty flush and tender light. Children strewed flowers beneath her feet : people wished the newly-married joy ; the wedding-bells chimed merrily ; the air seemed filled with sunlight and music.

Lord St. Norman held his daughter in his arms as he bade her good-by.

“ You will be very happy, Ethel,” he said. “ You have married a hero—and I many tell you now that the dearest wish of my heart has been accomplished.”

The baronet and his wife went to Fountayne for their honeymoon.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is not a more beautiful or popular woman in her county than Ethel, Lady Charlcote; fair children are blooming around her, brave young sons and lovely daughters rise up and call her blessed. But, in the midst of all her triumphs—of her tender love for husband and children, of the homage that is her portion—of the honor that is her due—in the midst of it all she preserves the greatest humility of heart, remembering the folly of her youth, and how terribly she suffered for it.

Loving, beloved, happy, and honored, Ethel, Lady Charlcote, lives in the present. Her husband's heart rejoices in her. She takes her fair-haired children on her knee, and tells them the virtue dearest to Heaven is humility, and that the sin that brings keenest, swiftest, surest punishment is pride.

THE END

115







14 DAY USE  
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED  
**LOAN DEPT.**

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or  
on the date to which renewed.

Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

JAN 11 1968 *yk*

JAN 21 1968

LD 21A-45m-9,'67  
(H5067s10)476B

General Library  
University of California  
Berkeley





